

DAILY NOTES
HISHAM AL-THAHBI

**STREET
CHILDREN...**

**VICTIMS OR
CRIMINALS?**



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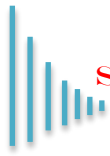
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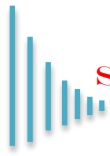
To my dear reader,

firstly I would like to thank you for your interest in the topic of this book and your concern to acquire it. I hope you find in it what will add to your convictions to work together uniformly and humanitarially. I also hope that this book will support your determination and insistence on the unification of positive energies to create successful solutions to very complex problems that we all suffer from everyday in our country in new Iraq.

In this book I put forward my experience of thirteen years with and orphaned children in Baghdad. During these years I came across more than two hundred displaced and orphaned children and I was able to transform them into children with normal lives after they were marginalised and considered a burden on society.

I bear in mind the importance of explaining to the reader the reality of the failure of successive governments to play their role in embracing and caring for children in Iraq in general and particularly for orphans and street children. It is important that we do not forget the negative role of society who look down on street children and who judge them for being in the situation that they are in, as if they came from another country or chose this life themselves and that this life was not imposed on them at a time when everyone should stand by their side and hold accountable those who put these children in such conditions. My project follows principles of faith, which can best be depicted using the following saying: do not challenge one who has nothing to lose.

I do not challenge myself or else I will lose what is left of my home country Iraq and what is left of my festered conscious for those children. Based on my human senses I launched my project challenging all obstacles and difficulties in order to make a contribution to change even a small part of this reality in particular post-war displaced children whose fate is to be with us under the sky of one country that suffered from war, siege, killing



and poverty. Through many years of diligent work I accumulated invaluable experiences and found in them human values that deserve to be known, documented and published. This will help alter the way in which society views them and will also offer many opportunities to positively integrate in our Iraqi society, in its unsafe and unstable situation.

In this book I will mention some stories of children who experienced a downturn in their lives and the effect this had on shaping their personalities until fate brought us together allowing us to overcome the obstacles they had been through and make it into a positive ground to correct their personal and social situation as a starting point to convert them into good citizens who are capable of denying the sour/painful negative past through their willingness and determination. This will allow them to accept themselves and their reality once again and to build new and healthy relations with this reality that was neglected by the community and government as they regarded these children to be hopeless cases that go beyond rescue. Based on this regard, their problem was ignored and they were left in the streets and a large number of them were imprisoned without providing effective rehabilitation programmes. This is where our responsibility and role is required towards an important sector of society that was marginalised as a result of mismanagement and misuse of public money that was used on unimportant issues. The effective management and use of public money could have changed the lives of this sector into productive members of society through education, health and social activities. Therefore, we now face a dangerous social problem that is in need of a serious stand to put it in its real frame and give it its importance in order to implement effective strategies and solutions.

The danger of neglecting this sector has formed a prominent social class in Iraqi society after the war and occupation, which could gradually transform into an



unclear class capable of jeopardising any positive vision and movement hence becoming a destructive force of what's left of Iraq and its institutions and its present civilian life, this could happen if they are exploited and integrated in gangs and groups that jeopardise the stability and security in Iraq as an excuse to express their right to exist and be acknowledged.

My dear reader, I will end my introduction using the words of Japanese professor and researcher Nobuaki Notohara from the introduction of his book *Arabs in the eyes of the Japanese* reminding us " Feelings are a limited personal issue which does not produce a future. This view allows us to understand the disaster of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and our relation with the world". I am not a dreamer nor am I a poet and I do not work for fame, as I do not seek to exploit fateful issues to reach any kind of position. However, I believe that the power of displacement and poverty in reshaping, fragmenting, and drowning the society through feelings of loss, surrender and hatred to become a lost and violent society.

Away from politicization and feelings of hatred, I kindly urge you to work with me and the children and people of Iraq as we all need love, peace and trust in one another in order to overcome the mistakes and crimes of politicians and occupation.

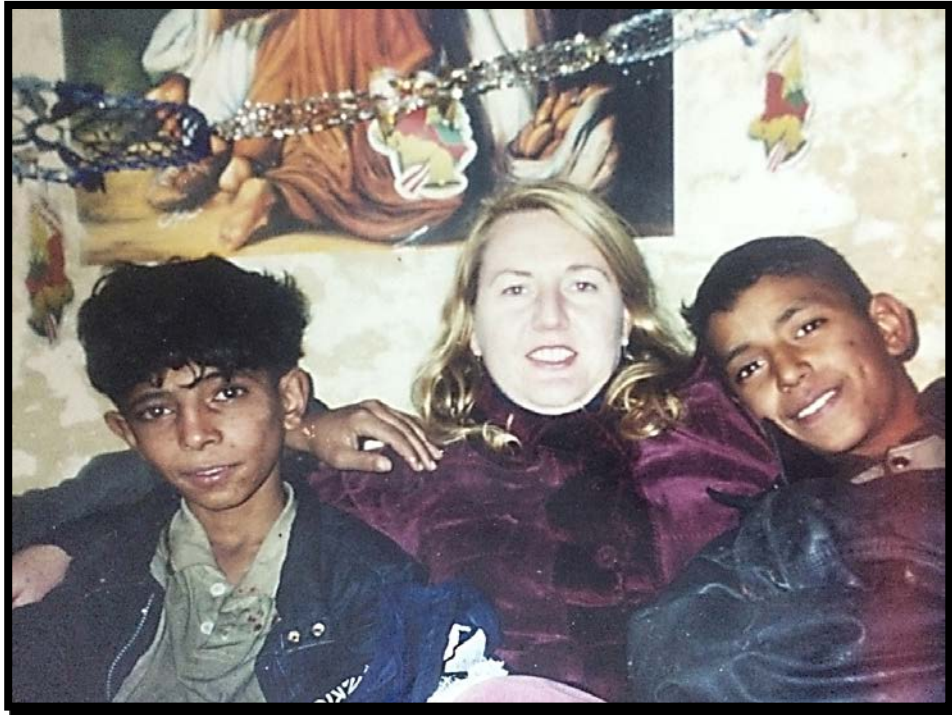
Reformation:

Possible in all circumstances and time, providing there is a good environment and people who believe in reformation and possess the tools for it.

Hesham Al- Dahabi

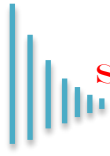


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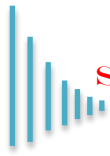
This lady convinced me that street children are victims who did not choose this reality but was imposed on them and they deserve to be given a chance to change. She is an Austrian lady named Donna who chose to work with displaced Iraqi children at a time when they were forgotten by their people...

Thank you Donna for every humanitarian lesson you taught me and thank you to every displaced child who was looking forward to change and succeeded.



Part One

Long stories



Street Children

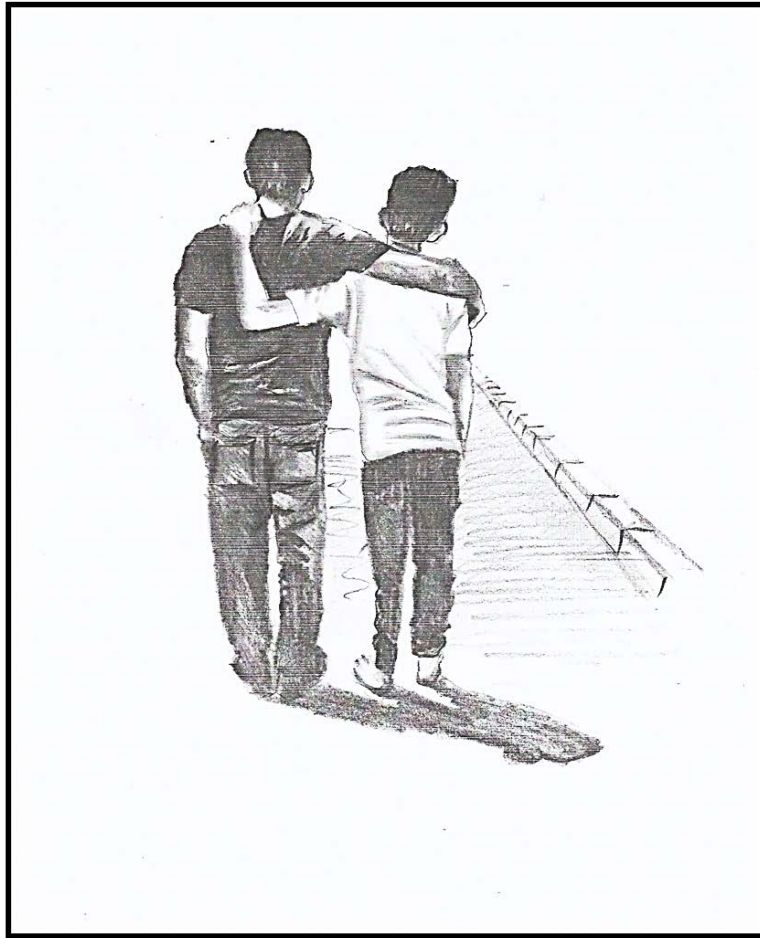
Street children are a social problem prevalent in all developed and underdeveloped societies of the world, however the serious or even simple ways in which it is dealt with distinguishes this problem in each country.

Street children look and wait impatiently for opportunities that will allow them to transform themselves. However, unfortunately these opportunities are hard-won especially because the family, community and government do not offer them. The family insists on driving children into the streets and not giving them any of their rights, sometimes they even exploit them through forcing these children to partake in work that is not suitable for their age in order to avoid the burden of high labour costs, depriving children from exercising their own childhood and forcing them to mature prematurely. The society looks down on these children and rejects them and therefore we unintentionally participate in implementing this view and as a result the child is convinced of this view and practices all the negative habits of the street without shame. As for the government, its institutions are unable to contain this social problem and doesn't look for serious solutions or seek support from specialised organisations and experts to tackle this problem that threatens the security of society since their best solution is to arrest and prosecute them as it requires less effort and because society doesn't believe in rehabilitating them.

Hesham Al-Dahabi



The story of Tom and Jack



Two brothers named Tom and Jack, their father is Egyptian and their mother is Iraqi, the older brother Tom was eleven years old when he first came to the orphanage and the younger brother Jack was eight years old, they were two of the most difficult cases that we had come across due to a number of reasons. One of the reasons was addiction to drugs: nasal insufflation, solvents (paint thinner) and adhesives (Seccutine). They were addicted to drugs in a very big way to the extent that they would always escape from the orphanage with the aim of sniffing drugs, especially Tom he was very violent and aggressive and addicted. They used to live with their mother in “Al-Allawi Mahilla al-Thahab” inside a shared living space with several other families whose circumstances were similar to that of their mothers.



Their father left them, him and the children's step-father dealt very roughly with Tom and treated him very badly, this was what ostracised him from everyone else and made choose life on the streets, which he preferred over the life with his mother. Due to his unlucky fate and the harshness of his life, he spent years of his life in the Juvenile Shelter Detention Facility for the crime of begging and vagrancy. Unfortunately our culture always holds accountable and punishes the victim and leaves the offender unpunished. It can be asked why the younger brother Jack was also in the streets? Because he is young and we didn't mention that the father was rough with him? We answer this question by drawing attention to the fact that there wasn't a family in the first place because the mother used to hang out here and there and sometimes would take a lot of drugs and therefore it is to be expected that Tom and Jack would be in the streets.

The two children used to spend most of their time out of the house and mostly sleep in the streets. They were engaging in all types of inappropriate behaviour out of obedience to the leadership of juveniles who would tell them what to do and force them to do a lot of things such as begging and gathering empty bottles for fizzy drinks and sometimes stealing. Especially Tom because he was young and skinny he was exploited by them and sent to steal from shops and pharmacies and banking offices and they would also exploit him to receive sympathy from people because he is very young.

Back to the point, returning them to the home was almost impossible especially with Jack as he was very aggressive and violent and did not like to be subjugated by his father in the previous relationship and his time in the Juvenile shelter facility during the time of the previous regime under Saddam's rule. He spent more than five years in this facility and saw and lived the torture of it and the terrible treatment, which him and his peers experienced and how they were beaten every day with or without reason. This is what made him escape from the shelter



and think a thousand times before he enters a shelter another time. However the task of convincing his friends in the streets and getting their agreement in entering our safe orphanage was easier than the task of convincing him, furthermore his younger brother Jack agreed to go with us despite Tom's refusal and the threat that he was older and controlling over Jack. The most important reason was that there is a strong relationship between Tom and the bigger homeless juveniles who control the children. The bigger children have a high level of influence over Tom and they pushed him to refuse and prevent Jack from going with us, because with his departure they would lose the most important elements of the group and he is the youngest, most energetic and most resourceful and they relied on him for difficult tasks as represented in what we mentioned before such as stealing, begging and cheating people.

Jack joined the safe orphanage and Tom then followed him. Tom was accused of stealing money from one of the juvenile elders and as a result of this danger and fear Tom sought safety in the orphanage, stealing from the elders is regarded a serious incident as it would embarrass them and undermine their status amongst their peers. All this drove Tom to escape the streets and seek safety within the project as he thought this would be a temporary measure until the storm calms and the incident is forgotten about. As he joined and due to his aggressive nature and drug addiction many problems began to arise to the extent that he began to hide bottles of spirit outside under the grass and discretely go out to inhale it and return without being noticed. This caused the staff a lot of embarrassment, as the director of the project would hold them accountable.

I will now come back to his first day and here I am referring to Tom as he was very devastated despite the fact that he chose to come to the orphanage, however his difficult attitude makes it uneasy to manage him as he doesn't like to be compared to the others or be equal



to them and prefers his own space. This situation confused us as we didn't want to give up on him neither did we want to give him privileges as this would open the door for other children to be treated in the same way, this is when we intervened to work with him. I was receiving the new cases arriving at the orphanage, I would cut their hair and clean their bodies after their check-up and amongst the cases that I personally dealt with was that of Tom's. He used to refuse to shower or have his hair cut and what was really strange was that majority of the children would refuse to have their hair cut as they cherished it a lot despite its uncleanness and length. Tom was amongst those who cherished his hair and he had not had his hair cut for about a year or maybe even more as his hair was long and dirty and full of insects. However, his tactics were of no use as I forced him to cut his hair and the lice were falling out of his hair in very large numbers and he was very sad, out of curiosity I asked him why are you sad? Is it because of your hair or the lice, look at how they are escaping from you. He smiled and said, "No sir, aren't I the one who has looked after them all these years". After the hair cut I took him to the bathroom and gave him a shower of a lifetime to the extent that he felt very tired after the shower and slept until the late hours of the night as if the shower erased all his worries and got rid of the burden. When he woke up the next morning he regretted coming to the safe orphanage and losing his hair and its dirt and he was also in regret because he agreed to work with others and therefore many problems began to arise with his peers and social workers. And here lies an important matter, due to him and his intense drug addiction he suffered especially because we restricted him over the following few days after we found out about him leaving the home several times to inhale paint thinner and Seccutine. What encouraged him to stay at home was his fear of the problems of the streets particularly the one he was involved in and of course his



time in the house without any drugs can create a lot of problems for him. There were several ways whereby Tom and a few other children would take drugs, for example they would empty the adhesive (Seccutine) or thinner substance in a small nylon bag and would abuse these drugs orally to the extent that they would lose all senses around them. Sometimes they would place a small piece of material inside the solvent container and would wet it and inhale it, this would remain in their hands for a while. Since we found out about their tactics they had no choice but to come up with new ways that we wouldn't find out about. In the winter we bought them gloves to protect them from the cold of the winter, however what sparked our suspicions was that they would wear the gloves even when the weather was warm and sunny and would refuse to take them off. This is when I felt that something strange was going on that we need to find out about. During lunchtime, the children would take their gloves off and place them in their pockets not letting them out of their sight, so one day when we were all having lunch I pulled the glove from one of the children's pockets without him noticing and I saw that he had placed a piece of materiel inside the glove rinsed in thinner and he would sniff it through the glove. When we discovered this they moved on to their next tactic, which was soaking the glove itself in thinner and sniffing the glove directly as well as many other ways to get their hands on these drugs.

Let us leave Tom and return back to Jack the younger brother who considered himself spoiled because of the protection he was offered in the streets in return for his services that had no ties attached and this meant complete freedom which made it difficult for him to join the orphanage. Furthermore, the privileges he experienced on the streets made him controlling over other children and also made children fear him because of the protection he was offered by juvenile gang leaders. Tom enjoyed the bad activities he would carry out



because he was encouraged by the leader of the group who paid him. He told me that one night they decided to burgle a pharmacy in the area of Al-Betaween after observing the area and pharmacy for a while to determine how to enter the pharmacy and what to steal. After making these observations they set a date and time for the burglary and Jack was chosen to carry it out because he was the smallest, smartest and bravest. He entered the pharmacy through the air ventilation after he dismantled the air suction and he stole all the money that was there as well as a range of medicines such as cough medicines which a lot of them used as a substitute for alcohol due to the narcotic substances which it contains. After the burglary, Jack received a lot of attention and fame amongst displaced children and everyone spoke about his bravery and heroic behaviour.

Jack and Tom had immense influence and power at the home, most kids were scared of them because they were hostile and they had a relationship with the youth on the streets. The kids believed that they were going to have to leave the home eventually and would have to face these youth. After some of the kids settled down, they started dealing with their addiction by seeing specialists at Ibn Rushud hospital and taking medicine. However, we were faced with a problem with the severely addicted children, who ran away every once in awhile to procure inhalants. We used to chase them and bring them back with immense difficulty. For instance, the day Tom ran away from the home we knew he would be in the Bataween area in Bab El Sharqi, the same area we found him. When we finally caught up with him he started screaming, "They're thieves! They want to kidnap me" in the middle of the market in front of all the people there. People started closing in and asking why we're trying to catch this kid, demanding instant and convincing answers. The



scene also attracted the attention of several policemen, which resulted in us getting arrested and questioned. Luckily, I always carry a dossier holding all of our licenses and certificates, in addition to documents that explain our work and photos, including one of Tom and me. When the police saw the file and the documents they sympathized with our work in these exceptional circumstances. At the time that each person was looking out for his own we were thinking of and trying to help these marginalized children. The policemen's tone changed, they started trying to convince Tom to come back with us. After more than an hour and with all our heads put together we were able to persuade him. However, he didn't settle down at the home and kept running away. He once even struck me with a broken glass leaving a scar on my back, I still remember him every time i see it. After a while of going through this cycle of him running and us bringing him back we decided to identify cases of severe addiction, because every time they ran away we had to start with them from square one. We identified four kids who were severely addicted, I suggested to temporarily take them to a place removed from this environment and from the shops that sold paint thinner and glue. The distance and time would be a rehabilitation and recovery period for them. The project manager, Ms. Asmaa Jameel, agreed to the suggestion to take Tom and Jack, along with two other kids, Hassan and Amer to Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan. Save the Children Kurdistan provided us with a house and we initially decided to keep them there for a month while rotating the researchers that stayed with them. I believed a house would be better than a hotel so the kids can cook, shop and clean themselves, which would make them feel



important as they are contributing to their environment. During the time I stayed with them I created a program complete with chores, daily activities for sports, excursions, some constructive games and shopping. Still, all of that didn't prevent them from fighting and complaining about chores or not wanting to go to a certain place and asking to go to another.

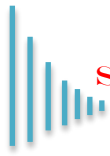
My biggest fear was that one of them would run away while we were there, that responsibility would fall squarely on my shoulder because this program was my idea. This fear did come true, once while we were shopping, Amer asked to buy something and I said no. Tom got involved and started yelling at Amer causing him to run away. Heart pounding, I followed Amer keeping one eye on the rest of the kids and one eye on him. When I finally caught up with him he wanted to scream and cause a scene, especially after noticing that Kurdish police were nearby. I had to think fast, I hugged him and whispered, "If you attempt anything I will take you back to Baghdad tomorrow. But if you come with me now we will go play videogames." Thankfully, it worked. The other kids were impressed, they kept asking about what I said to him that made him come back, I said that it was a secret between him and I and he smirked.

Tom and Jack fought all the time as well, they'd hit each other and curse each other out often. The turning point was the day I witnessed all the brotherly love in Jack's face when I sent Tom to get bread from the bakery for dinner and he took longer than expected. Jack was pacing, he kept looking out of the door and going up to the roof to keep an eye on the street. I was very happy about this transition in spite of concern for Tom. When Tom returned, Jack's eyes started dancing with glee, his



tears exposing his big heart and the bond he shares with his brother. Seeing this made me more determined than ever to make this project a success and intensified my commitment to this work as humane work far from the job, its rules, its times and salary. After ten days with the kids in Sulaymaniyah, it was time for the researcher rotation, this made the kids disgruntled, they wanted me to stay with them. They decided to come back with me despite doing everything I can to convince them. Amer in particular was unhappy, he said that he'll either come back with me or run away again. I decided to take Him back to avoid trouble and to make the other researcher's job easier. Unfortunately, the replacement researcher didn't last for more than three days before asking to go back to Baghdad. To avoid ruining the progress the kids made, I decided to take Tom with me to my house despite the criticism and objection of those close to me who thought bringing a homeless kid to my house was implorable. Later, I was thankfully able to change that opinion, a quantum leap in both the kids and the others lives.

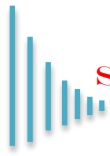
As time passed I found out that Tom has been suffering from pain on his side, after taking him to the doctor we found out that one of his kidneys was weak and he was given treatment. Due to his illness, I decided to keep Tom in my house for another week, and this one week was enough to change the trajectory of Tom's life and transform him from an addicted street child to a responsible and dependable kid. He began asking us to give him chores like buying bread, grocery shopping and cleaning, but what caught my attention was that he made his bed every morning and that left me with the belief that every kid has the potential to be good if provided



with a safe environment. That is what I strived to do, to provide Tom with a safe, familial space and to increase his confidence by giving him more responsibilities and encouraging and depending on him. This treatment brought out Tom's good traits that, at times, stunned my wife and me, especially when he encouraged my sons to do their homework and help their mother. We were so happy and proud that we were able to contribute in causing this change. Seeing Tom like that reinforced the feeling that I was doing the right thing by helping him and his peers. The shift in Tom's behavior reflected positively on my friends and family, they started treating him with respect and love, they shared food and conversation with him. Seeing this all unfold me gave me renewed energy and helped me continue my work and put more time and effort into it. Tom was appreciative of what we had done for him and he returned the favor, a characteristic I appreciate immensely, and that set him apart from his peers. Our relationship kept improving save for a few spats here and there that were caused by his need to not be an ordinary kid, he created problems until he got the attention and felt special. Intelligent and cunning, Tom knew what buttons to push to make the researchers and staff give him what he wanted without exerting the effort to earn it. Nevertheless, he was never successful in doing that with me because I knew his ways. I let him do what wanted and made him do what I wanted. I didn't acquiesce to his demands no matter how stubborn he got except for a few instances where it wouldn't have caused any harm to the project or go against the home rules. Some time passed and Jack and Tom were successfully separated by the researchers. One researcher focused on Jack and I focused on Tom. We divided the kids into



groups, one researcher to a group. Hani, one of the researchers, was responsible for Jack's group. I had immense respect for Hani's work despite some disagreements. He was an efficient and determined worker and was as dedicated as me, which created a healthy competition between the two of us to provide the kids the best services. Separating Jack and Tom made things easier for both Hani and myself because focusing on one case is easier than focusing on two. We showered them both with love and care, they were always with us even when we went home after the work day. This made the progress with their rehabilitation move much more effective. Unfortunately, another obstacle appeared in the form of the youth on streets, who were frequenting the home demanding that we release some kids every now and then because they lost the income these kids brought when they were on the street begging and stealing. The absence of kids made the youth depend on themselves to work because people weren't as inclined to them money, they even demanded that the youth find work instead of beg, which didn't work out for the youth. They started coming back and demanding either one of the kids to go back with them or money for the time they took care of the child on the street. The project manager gave them the money at times and rarely resorted to calling the police, a decision that could have caused problems for both parties for the police may beat the youth and hurt them, which makes them vengeful, preventing us from entering their areas or keeping kids who escape and not return them to us or even hurt him in reaction of what they went through with the police. We needed a radical solution for this problem, I suggested to starting a temporary home for the youth for six months



and that would enable us to make progress with the kids by keeping them away from the streets and from the youth. The project manager agreed and we were able to put the youth in a house and make it clear to the kids that they will be on their own if they returned to the streets because the youth left and are not coming back. I will take you back now to when Tom was first admitted into the home. When I asked what would he wish for, he said that he wish for three hand grenades. Shocked I asked him what he would do with them? He responded, "I will use the first one to blow my stepfather up for all the times he hurt me. The second to blow up the market, because all the children went there to buy new things with their parents except for me, and the third one to blow up the school because all the children go to school in the morning except for me, I stay on the street." After hearing this you can imagine the anguish Tom suffered and the amount of jealousy and resentment and he held in his heart at this young age. And from this story you can also see how we can make this resentment and anguish ebb away with patience, love and thoughts that transformed Tom. Despite some positive changes in Tom, he remained very moody, his behavior was very inconstant, he was sometimes very obedient and obliging, and sometimes stubborn refusing everything in the House. Sometimes active and motivated willing to study, and sometimes lazy and idle not willing to study at all. Because of this moodiness, the social workers tended to stay away from him and did not want get closer to him. This has impacted negatively on his psychological state and made him always uncompromising with them, refusing to carry out what they ask him to do, and to follow the House's rules always nagging and screaming and being defensive



towards the children and the social workers. He became very annoying and disturbing to everyone in addition to his several attempts to escape from the House. This is why the project managers have decided not to host him anymore if he escapes again from the House. I was very much against this decision as I believe that a child does not know what is good for him and that it is our duty to make him know where his interest lies. Him leaving and not coming back and our inability to convince him to stay is our failure and not his, and we are the ones to blame. Tom escaped and the decision was made not to host him anymore, time went on and he was in the street trying to win back the position he lost because of his integration to the project. He was also catching up on what he lost of addiction from solvents and adhesives (paint thinner and Seccutine) in addition to getting back to his old habit of begging and sometimes stealing. We lost any contact with him which surprised him, as he was used seeing us chasing him everywhere and bearing many difficulties and problems to get him back. After a certain time, he started to get back to us and we were seeing him close to the House gathering empty bottles of fizzy drinks, passing by and staying deliberately close to the House to attract our attention. We deliberately ignored him so that he would ask us himself and request to enter the House. This way, we would manage to force him to follow the House's rules in conditioning his admission. What happened is that he disappeared two days after appearing close to the House. I think he lost hope of getting back to the House and decided to go back to the place he feels he belongs to that is the street. After several months we heard from children of the street that Tom died after a fire occurred in the street. We rushed to



al-Batawin area to find him and every time we saw a homeless child or youngster we asked if the news about Tom dying burned was true? Some denied other confirmed but nobody was able to show us where he was until I met a youngster from the young displaced that I know and who knows me and asked him about Tom. He laughed and said: "It is all that impact on him". I asked him again and he said: "What's wrong with you sir, Tom is like a horse".

He indicated the place where Tom was staying, it was like a building structure that was taken by homeless children and youngsters as a shelter protecting them from the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter and was also used to store the empty bottles of alcoholic drinks that would be solved after a large amount was gathered. I left the youngster and ran into the building and found Tom. My feelings were mixed between joy and pain, between the satisfaction and the rejection, between love and hatred. The most important thing is that I talked to him and that he was very happy that I visited him but he did not want to show me his joy and tried to pretend that he was at ease and that his situation in the street was good. It did not last long and very quickly he broke into tears as he was suffering from the burns he experienced and from his situation in the street.

He started to tell the story of his accident, he said: I was sleeping in a freezer every night after that everyone was asleep and the place was dark and quiet. I chose this place in order to be far away from the places of homeless youngsters as well as in cold nights, it was a safe place a bit far away from the houses of the homeless and nobody knew about it. During one cold night, while I was asleep despite the cold after a very long and tiring day spent standing on my feet from very early in the morning to very late in the night to gather the empty bottles. I was between awake and asleep, and I felt something warm



growing in my body that made me feel good in a way I haven't felt since the years I was in your house Sir Hisham. Shortly, I started to feel the heat everywhere and it was getting hotter and it was hurting me to the point of waking me up completely. I started to find the walls of the freezer very hot to the point that it was burning my body and getting more and more painful. I jumped and opened the door of the freezer that was horizontal and its door was on the top and opening from the top. I wanted to jump from it but I was stopped by the fire surrounding the freezer from everywhere blocking me. Unfortunately, I was barefoot and it caused burns under my feet. I threw myself outside the freezer and the fire started to burn my clothes from the back and I got burned in many places in the back of my thigh and under my neck and on the back of my hip. I was treated in the hospital and they gave me pomade to put on the injuries for a while but I did not carry on the treatment because it was too painful. I took him back to the project and he saw a doctor specialized in burns that gave us a good treatment for him that consist in applying pomade on the burns after scrapping them every day. It is a very painful procedure for Tom and for us as we watched him suffering from the pain it caused and we are obliged to carry it on

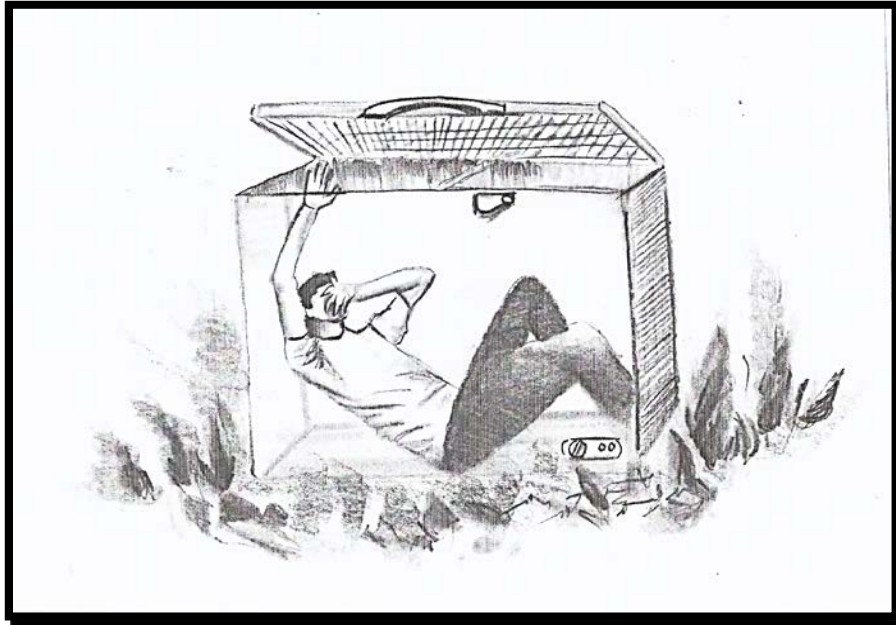
every day in order for him to heal. One of our house's social workers was in charge of it and he was receiving all kind of insults and hits from Tom in doing it. The treatment carried on like that during a week or ten days and after that he started healing and being healthy and active again. Let's go back to Jack who was adapting very quickly to the other kids and whose situation was progressing well

especially after the trip to Kurdistan that played an important and positive role in helping four kids to get rid of their

addiction completely to the exception of Tom who was going back to it sometimes. We moved from our location



in al-Waziryah on al-Rasafah side to Al-Seydyah in al-Karkh side which kept us away from the place where most of the solvents and adhesives (paint thinner and seccutine) were distributed. It made it easier to get rid of



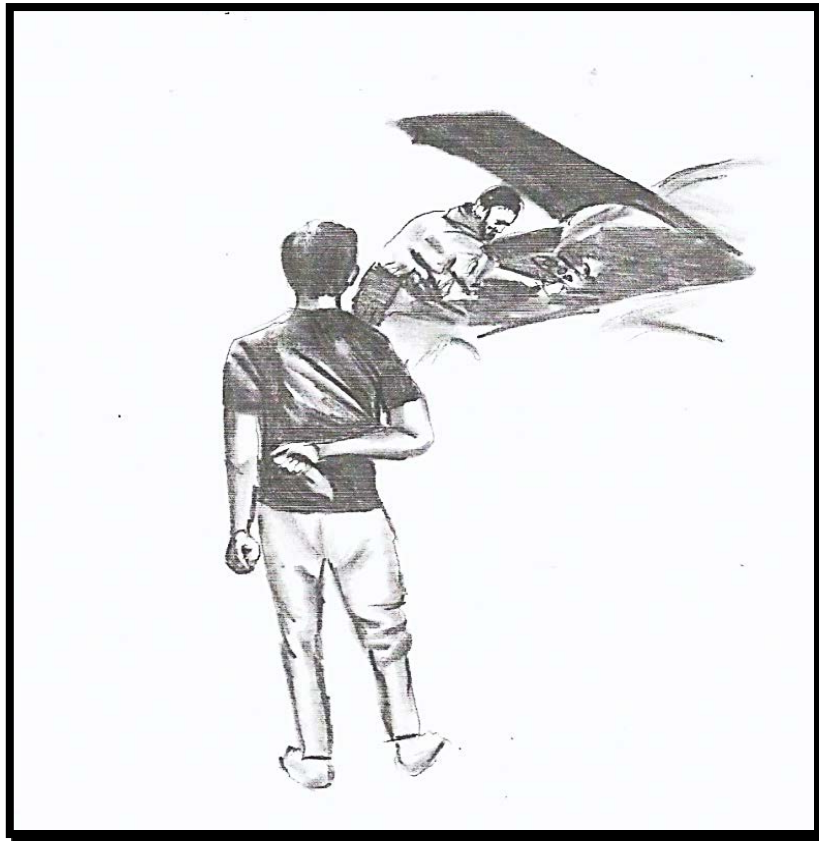
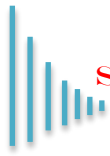
their addiction. In addition to that, the care provided by the social worker Hani to Jack and the tenderness he was providing him changed Jack completely making him seem younger and more open to the treatment. His interaction with the other children at school allowed him to get rid of his addiction completely as he became busy studying and he participated to the swimming activity with our other kids in the project. His results were remarkable as they learnt to swim in the Tigris river when they were homeless. After registering their names as swimmers in the Iraqi Unions of Swimming, they carried on this activity for years and won many prizes. Following my proposal and keeping up in our achievements with the children and teenagers we separated them and I requested to take them to the former House in al-Waziryah as we had paid its rent until the end of the year and we still had five months to go. The head accepted and I took them there, they were ten and not willing to study. They were also older than 13 years old. I tried to get them a job in the manufacture field according to their



wish after that I received some help from supportive bosses. They were divided according to their request, Tom wanted to work in cars metalworking and we managed to meet his request. He started to work with a seriousness and motivation that weakened with time. This was because of the nature of his moodiness that makes him very motivated at the beginning and then change his mind and leave what he is doing. This is a characteristic present in most of the children that I encountered in the project and I link it to the behavior of the teacher or the trainer or the boss. If the boss encourages his workers and complement their work even when small, Tom would have kept his motivation and will. The nervousness of the boss and his constant insults towards his workers push them to dislike him and this is what happened one day. I accompanied the teenagers every day to work with my personal car and I stayed close to them and came back to pick them up and drive them back to the house. Most of the time, I took them to my house because of its closeness from the place of work and during the lunch breaks I went back for my lunch at home and came back to them afterwards. One of my friends who owns a shop of car tools got in touch asking me to come straightaway without willing to tell me why despite the fact that I asked him several times. I came very quickly by car and arrived at the place where the teenagers work. Before I asked anything, I saw Tom standing afar with signs of complain and anger emerging on his face, I joined him quickly and asked him: What's wrong Tom? He replied: Nothing is wrong Sir. I looked at his hands that he was hiding behind his back asking him: What are you hiding? He replied nothing Sir. I took his hand and discovered a triangular piece of glass as big as a big hand that was scary. I repeated the question several times: what do you do with it? He said: I swear Sir if you were not here I would have killed him? I said surprised: Who are you talking about? He replied: "Awdah", which is the name of his boss, a middle aged man between 45 and

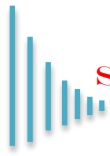


50 years old. I told him: Why? He replied: He hits me, it's okay, he insults me, it's okay, but he insults you Sir, no that I can't accept and I will put this piece of glass in his belly. Some of my friends saw me and a came towards me followed by Awdah and then a group of people gathered around us and my friends started to calm Tom down joking with him. Tom blew up crying and started to scream very strongly: I don't care about myself nor about my father being insulted. But why is he insulted Sir Hisham? Awdah interrupted joking: Why do you care so much about Sir Hisham? He is my friend and my brother and I insult him. Tom replied: No, you do not have the right and I do not accept in front of me. This moment, I was astonished, silent and happy inside on the one hand because of Tom's love towards me and on the other hand sad for him for what Awdah did to him. I did not stay silent for long and I began talking directing myself to Awdah first, I told him: Why do you hit him? I do not accept that anyone cross the borders with them whoever he is and whatever my relation to him. Awdah felt ashamed and tried to justify his behavior saying that Tom does not deserve respect and crossed the borders with someone older than him. I cut him saying that if he goes beyond the lines you have to tell me and I will deal with him, he is a child and we need to care for him. I then took Tom with me in my car and we went to the house and I was very happy about what he has done trying to take my defense. At the same time, I thanked God that he did not fall into a big trouble in hitting Awdah with this piece of glass in his hand. This event represented a big shift in our relationship because Tom showed me that he deserved all the tiredness and effort that I spent for him and that what I have done



for him was not a waste. What happened gave me more positive energy that pushed me to carry on this work and to be determined despite all the challenges in order to succeed. After this event, the children of the street became my cause and my essential goal and I took the responsibility to represent them and to advocate for their rights and to change society's opinion on them. People became used to their presence around me in my house, with me in my car in the market and everywhere. Some people are against it, other criticize and some sympathize and compliment my work.

All these events happened to me during the time I was an employee in the field of children protection in Kurdistan that I did not interrupt before the end of 2006 and the beginning of the sectarian war in Baghdad. While the social worker Hani was working every day in family integration, he was accompanying one of the orphan children in his visit to his sibling living in a state orphanage. On their way, there was a quarrel between



policemen and a gang and unfortunately the social worker Hani was passing in the way of the shots and received several shots in the head that killed him. Calm, sadness and boredom surrounded the project and it became depressing especially for me as I lost someone with whom I was competing to better the project, the only person that was motivating me to be active and to think. I lost the spirit of competition without losing hope in reform and the achievement of the human path and success so that Hani's soul could find peace and ease and so that his sacrifice wouldn't be wasted. After the accident of Hani and because of the region financial crisis, the governorate decided to close the project and to give the children to the state. I was against that and I managed in my own way to take them without letting the head of the project know about it because he was agreeing in order to keep his position and his high salary. It didn't break my determination and I took the decision to take the children and I didn't give them to the governorate. I contacted the head of the governorate of Sulaymaniyah who told me that we informed the head of the project that the project ended since two months and that we were surprised of the fact that you did not inform us. The only thing I could ask is to get back the children's personal belongings as I took them with their clothes only. He accepted for part of it and the rest of their personal belongings were moved to Kurdistan. Most of these belongings were donations for the children and some of them I managed to gather through my contacts and through organizations and governmental and non-governmental institutions that donated it to the children. Even the belongings that were bought by the organization were funded by the project from the European Union or international organizations linked to the Kurdistan organization. The most important thing is that I took the children and that they were put under my care and responsibility and I became in charge of everything they need and in carrying on the same activities and services



provided for them. This has not been easy, especially because I do not have any material resource or connection to any funding source. These challenges did not stop me and did not affect my determination to succeed and I was always telling myself: I will succeed because my goal is to make these children happy. Thank God I succeeded and progressed many steps forward and our achievements was visible to everyone to the point that I reached distance countries. Coming back to Tom, after we moved to Medinat al-Sadr one of Baghdad's biggest poor district in terms of the numbers of inhabitants and its space. I registered him in the morning school with the other children despite the fact that he was beyond the legal age that is allowed for attending the morning school thanks to my good relations to most of the people holding responsibilities in the education field and they sympathy to my project and to its children. His presence at school worried us a lot, we were afraid of the way he would be treated by the other children and of the way he would treat them because of his aggressiveness. This made us always careful and we intervene when it was needed. There is another problem which is the biggest and the most dangerous, our fear that he would escape from school and return back to the street and to taking dangerous products and that he would take with him other children because of his authority over some of them and his capacity to use many ways to convince them. Our mission was very hard and very dangerous so I was accompanying them to the school in the morning and going back to pick them up at the end to accompany them back home. Since we moved to Medinat al-Sadr, the school was very close to the house and Samir offered to be in charge of following their progress at school, he is among the very competent social workers and very serious and reliable as well as very experienced in his interaction with them as he is with us since the very beginning of the project.



Tom continued to attend school but not for long for several reasons such as his imposed aggressiveness and his advanced age in comparison to the other students in his class which made it difficult for him to apprehend the school curriculum especially the elements that were not adapted to the teaching. In addition to that, some of the male and female teachers are not performing their job well in primary schools in general and that adds to his difficulties to integrate and get on with the other students in this new environment. Tom did try to adapt and integrate but the reasons I mentioned made it difficult. He lost hope and became anxious and started complaining and creating problems in order to end his studies. He is now 15 years old and he is feeling that he is too old in comparison to the other children in the House despite the fact that some are his age, but his long experience of the street makes him feel older than the others. There is another problem, the fact that he lost his authority as other children of his age have more skills than him which makes him feel betrayed and broken. He started to compare his life in the street where he used to have authority over the other children to the one in the House where other children of his age have more skills than him. This is one of the biggest issue in the house, he always mentioned the way he was interacting with the children in the streets and the fact that they wanted to please him and serve him and that he was the one in charge of their protection there. I started to be aware of this risky situation and I was thinking of a way to keep him away from the House. By keeping him away I mean integrating him to a family, to his mother after I manage to stabilize his situation. I got in touch with his mother and organize the situation with her and I started to send him to her every week on Thursday and Friday. I was monitoring his situation in the house with his mother in asking her regularly how he was behaving and we were in touch all the time because I was afraid that he would flee back to the street another time and destroy



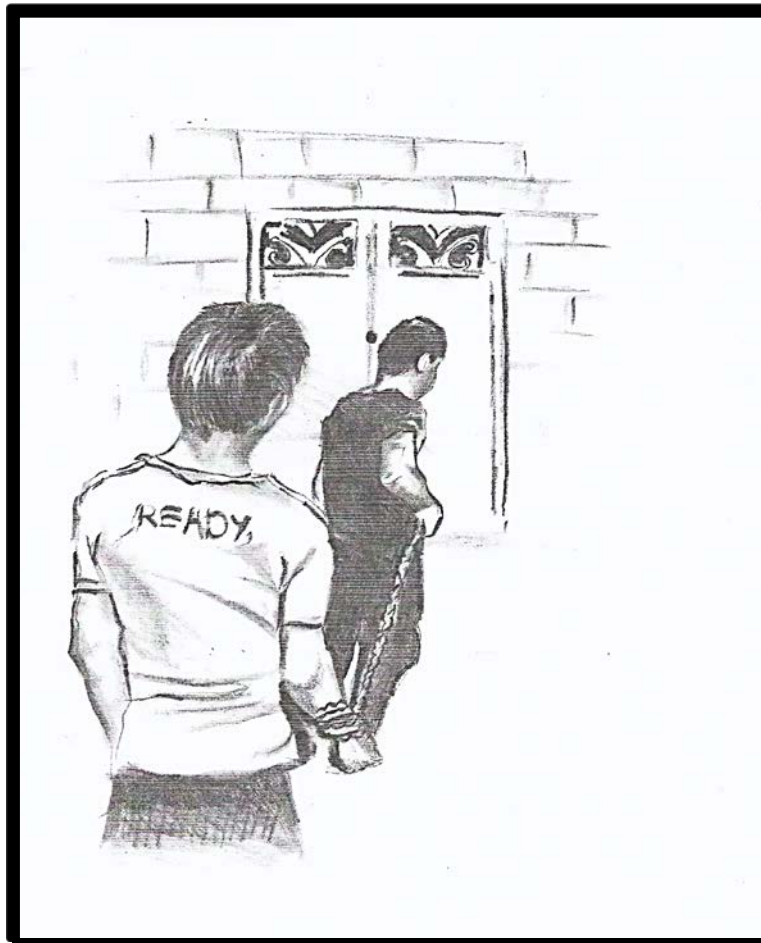
everything we have built for him during all these years. These issues were happening from time to time when there was a conflict between them and he escaped from the house. We were rushing into resolving the issue between him and her and getting him back home. The mother was always taking Jack with her every week and she did not care about Tom complaining that he was an addict and that he escaped all the time and that he talked in a way that was not appropriate and goes beyond his limits with her so she did not want to keep him. The reality is that Tom was judging her for her unethical behavior and was always quarrelling with her which pushed her to hate him and not to wish having him with her in the house. Jack on the contrary did not care about what she was doing in her house and he stayed silent to everything he saw her doing and did not judge her, this is why she prefers him to Tom. This is the main reason why Tom left the house and went back to the street. The most important is that we convinced him that we never abandoned him and that he became another human very different from the one he was 4 years ago or even before. He felt this important change in him-self because of the way we looked after him and his presence in my house and his feeling of being like one of my children because of the good way my wife and I treated him. After a while, he was reintegrated with his mother for good, we agreed with her that she keeps him with her in her house with our financial help and our distribution of monthly food to them. Jack stayed with us in the house as he was a student so that he could carry on his studies I preferred not integrating him for now. There is an essential issue that is one of the main ones among the others we are facing that makes our work difficult and our rate of success not higher than 60 percent which is the lack of official identity papers for most of the homeless children. For many reasons, among which the 'urfi marriage that is performed outside the court or child marriage of girls or the non-legal relationships or the disintegration of the family or the exile and



displacement from a region to another that provoke the loss of identity papers. This is one of the reason why I did not integrate Jack back with his mother because I know very well that she does not care about his studies and will take the excuse of the fact that he does not have identity papers that are necessary to the pursuit of his studies. This is why I decided to keep him until he finished the primary stage before I envisage to integrate him back to his mother. Someone representing the Interior Ministry informed me that the Interior Minister ordered to facilitate the procurement of the children of “The Save Iraqi House for Orphans” of all the identity papers on his behalf after I obtain the permission for them all. A group of representatives composed of the director of the office of travel and citizenship and the director of the office of the Iraqi ID and the director of the ID will visit the House so that they start the process of getting the children legal identity papers by them-selves. When we went to Tom in order to add him to the group for him to get his ID papers through this decision we did not find him in his house and we did not find his mother and we were told that they moved to another place. We did not manage to get his new address and because of that Tom lost his life-time opportunity that would have provided him the possibility to carry on a normal everyday life and to contribute to society



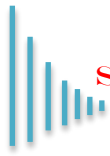
Batal's (Hero's) Story



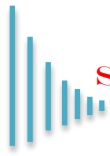
The circumstances that Iraq has gone through since the American Occupation in 2003 secreted a number of social and psychological problems that took many Iraqis as victims. The most affected among them were the children. Children are the usual victims of any extraordinary circumstance a country goes through be it war, economic crash, sectarian conflict or even familial issues. Children are the weakest link, they cannot fend for themselves or avoid danger. This reality was very much palpable in the last two decades, leaving Iraq with millions of orphaned, homeless and displaced children between the UN enforced embargo, the american occupation, sectarian conflict and terrorism. There is an



apparent societal dereliction toward that group of children, ignoring their problems and not putting them in a realistic frame. The question that is often posed is what does society have to do with it? Solving this issue is a governmental responsibility. The answer to that is the responsibility of children should be bore by all because the consequences of neglecting them affects not just the government but society as a whole. In fact, The most apparent effect of this neglect is on society itself. To solve this problem, we have to first change the stereotype of “street children” in particular because these children are marginalized, ostracized and treated as criminals rather than victims as if they had chosen to live this life. Furthermore, there should be a collective effort to identify the problems that “street children” face, put them in the spotlight and within a realistic frame and strive find solution for an issue that has been become increasingly difficult to solve. To put this issue in perspective I would like to tell you the story of a young boy who found himself without a family, home or community to hold him up, everyone around him contributed in pushing him toward delinquency. He internally fought against the inescapable reality and kept searching for the light of opportunity to live an honorable life and rebel against the reality that was forced upon him. A 7 year old fatherless boy with a mother with several mental problems and a brother who is an inhalants abuser (addicted to inhaling glue and paint thinner), which is a staple of the streets that he made home. Batal (Hero) used to follow his brother, 7 or 8 years his senior, everywhere like a shadow. Batal's company was not always welcomed as the brother wanted the freedom to roam as he pleases, he didn't want



Batal to know certain things about him and didn't want his little brother to get in trouble with the rest of the children in the street as they might hurt him physically, sexually abuse him or try to exploit people's sympathy for him by using him in begging, panhandling and theft. Hence the brother did not want to take him around but Batal kept following him. The two brothers were often found in the Bataween area, a neighborhood near Bab Al Sharqi, the commercial center of Baghdad. Bataween is a breeding place for street children and homeless people of both genders and of every age. For decades this area was popular among that population from Baghdad and other Iraqi provinces. The reason is there is a large number theaters where families and intellectuals go. These theaters still exist, some even still functioning while others were closed down due to the decreasing number of moviegoers. Batal learned addiction from his older brother, doing it in secret in the beginning, and with time it more publicly when they were not together and when batal hung out with other addicts. He wanted to prove that he is a man and that he can inhale just like the other kids on the streets. After the researchers and I conducted a field survey to specify the areas where these children hangout and how many of them there are Batal caught our team's attention. He didn't look like a street child in spite of wearing rags for clothes. We all believed that he was no older than 6 years due to his frailty and feebleness. The team decided to convince him to be a part of the project at any cost but first we had to convince his older brother to join as well. Convincing both of them to join was quite easy because the project was still in its initial stages and a few children had joined at that point. It is a blessing and a curse when two brothers join the



home for both the brothers themselves and the researches. The older one is usually in constant agitation in fear for his younger brother so he follows him and interferes at times when something happens or the younger brother is bullied by other. It is a blessing too at times for the researches, when we convince one of them to join the safe home the other automatically requests to join as well and at the same time. The biggest problem that we faced is that when one of them flees the home the other does not prefer to stay whatever the amenities are and no matter the progress they made in kicking their addiction and progressing at school. This was our biggest obstacle with Batal, he always fled the home soon after his brother did. I was always able to bring him back even if it took a lot of struggle. Every time I attempted to make him come back he screamed and made a scene saying that he was getting kidnapped and we were a gang, he even rammed me in the head once causing my nose to break. But even after all of this I didn't give up, on the contrary it made me more adamant to succeed in bringing back to The Safe Home. I had a feeling that he could be something in the future because he had certain characteristics that set him apart from the other children. At the end I was successful and I proved to everyone that my faith was well placed. The last time I chased Batal was in Bataween, I caught him after a long struggle in a side street where he started hysterically screaming "What do you want from me? Is there no other kid on the street? Why me?" I said yes, there is no other you either come back to the home or I quit all together. He ended up settling at the home and I continued working. After settling down, Batal returned to school. Some researchers started taking him to their houses to get him



away from the atmosphere of the home and other children he shared history with and to get him away from his brother, who was observing Batal and researchers' behavior carefully and often objected to Batal going to their houses using the excuse that he's scared for him or that Batal might run away again and he might not be able to find him. But as days passed, Batal going to researchers' houses became normal for us and a matter of fact for his brother and one step at a time we were able to separate the two with care and attention and encouragement. Batal's brother gave up and started acting as if he was alone at the safe home, he took this chance to rid himself the responsibility of his brother, something he has been waiting for for a long time now that he was reassured that Batal was in good hands. Not a long time passed before Batal's brother left the home and went back to the streets. I followed u[with him but he decided that coming back to the safe home wasn't what he wanted for reasons that, in my opinion, were convincing. He told me that he cannot stay without work and that he's not like the other homeless kids that are looking for a place to eat and sleep, that he was used to working since he was a child. I asked what if he goes back to to his addiction and he gave me his word that he will stop no matter the circumstances. He also told me to keep in mind that his mother is in the street and he wants to be around to take care her. His words uplifted me and gave me more energy to focus on the project. Batal was a good and disciplined student, but his grades were intermediate at best due to his speech difficulty and the time it took him to absorb what is being said to him and understand it. These learning difficulties caused Batal trouble caused the teachers to think that he is not



learning. They, unfortunately, often used the word “stupid” to describe him and this causes kids to fall back in school and in society because they start believing that they are stupid for the person who dubbed them that is the very teacher that they look up to and see as an idol. Batal continued school, and while he didn't excel academically, he was studious and always did his homework. During that time i started noticing that he has a passion for computers, he always sat next to the office manager and asked a lot of questions on different programs and how they operate. The manager was very interactive with Batal and was never annoyed with his questions and curiosity he even started giving home “homework” and made him do different tasks on the computer. Batal became obsessed with it and started doing things that the office manager did. The program he liked most was photoshop, he didn't know how to read or write english but that didn't stop him. He started memorizing the shape of the icon and use it after memorizing its place. This made me so happy that i bought him his own computer and started giving small tasks like enlarging photos, putting the words “Our Safe Home” on our photos, design logos or type letters to different people. This kind of responsibility increased Batal's confidence in himself and made him excel in this field. Unfortunately his success didn't last, after 7th grade there was a setback that put me at my worst since i started my work with homeless children four years earlier. One day when I arrived at The Safe Home, after our dissociation with Save the Children Kurdistan, One of the kids received me from the door telling me that Batal and another kid had run away for unknown reason. I immediately went to the office upstairs, which housed 30



large cabinets for the kids' stipends and a cabinet for donations. Large sums of money were missing. The reality of what happened struck me like lightning, I had lost the children and lost the money that people entrusted me with. At that time I reached a point of despair that I have never experienced before that made me believe that my work with this group of children was pointless, I lost all hope in any kind of reform or rehabilitation especially since the two kids were our two success stories in the home had run away. I had to proceed wisely and not show the researchers and the children the despair I was experiencing. I organized a meeting with the researchers to inform them of what had happened and caution them from mentioning it in front of the children. In spite of how I was feeling I didn't let anything on especially in front of the children. I told them that we won't let Batal and the other kid back into the home because they chose to leave after everything we had done for them.

We discreetly started sending search parties in hopes of finding them. We went to all the usual places and everywhere we thought they could have gone but found no trace. More than a week later we started giving up and facing reality that these kids did not want to be found. A few days later I got a call from an acquaintance of mine, I found it strange to get a call from him. He got straight to the point saying, "I heard that two children have escaped from The Safe Home" I answered "Yes, where are they?" He calmed me down saying that he found them in Kirkuk and now they're in a Juvenile Detention Center. A million questions clouded my mind; how did they get to Kirkut, almost 300 miles north of Baghdad? Why are they in juvenile detention? What are they charged with? What's

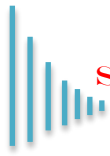


going to happen to them? Without my asking the man started answering my questions, "They booked a hotel room in Kirkuk. They had a large amount of money and fake Passports and documents. Being young and Arab, the hotel owner became suspicious and called the police. They were put in detention because they're young." I let that sink in and told him that I will be there first thing in the morning.

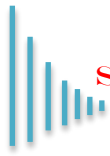
My brother-in-law, who lives in Kirkuk, was there upon our arrival and immediately took us to the detention center. We met with the warden, who received us with the utmost graciousness and hospitality and was very cooperative. We sat in his office explained what we do at the home and the care the children receive there, i asked him to bring the two kids out so they can back up my story and he sent for them. Batal was his usual self, smiling his signature big dumb smile. I felt his heart beating across the room and his rising level of anxiety, the other kid was visibly scared and anxious, he could not meet our eyes. The warden asked them why they ran away, they stayed quiet. He then asked if I, Hisham, did anything wrong or let them down in anyway. They spoke immediately and said it wasn't my fault. The warden concluded that their fate was in my hand. However, no matter what I decide, they won't be released that day because it was Thursday, the start of the weekend. He told us that we will have to wait until sunday so we can send their papers to the judge to get your release after we pay the bail. I begged him to release them right then and there, he apologized telling me that he had no control over it and he promised to do everything he could to release them on Sunday and that i don't need to be there, my brother-in-law can pick them up. I left the detention



center the worst I have ever been, feeling helpless and leaving the kids wasn't an easy thing for me to do. The road was long and I was in a different world. People were talking to me and i couldn't even hear them. I was playing back memories of the two kids and how I brought them to the home and everything we've been through, the image of their young selves didn't leave my mind. What hurt most is that I knew they were happy to see me even if they didn't show it, it was as if they were sure i was going to get them out. Unfortunately I couldn't and went back to the home empty handed and broken. When I got to The Safe Home the next day I met with the researchers and the children and told them about what had happened. I asked the children to think long and hard before doing anything that might get them in trouble that we might not be able to solve, I encouraged them to feel pertinence to this place that has become their home, that has become a safe home to them after all the dangers they faced on the streets. I asked them to help me to decide what to do with Batal and the other kid, their strong connection to these two made them beg me to forgive them while suggesting light punishments like no TV and no going out. The home children made these suggestions to help Batal and his friend avoid the real punishment of the streets and that was enough consolation for me. On Sunday, we were waiting eagerly for Mr. Sami to call and tell us about the boys' release. It wasn't until the afternoon that he called us and told us they were released and that they were with him. He would take them home to shower and have lunch there. An hour later, he called back to say that child "M", who was with Batal, had run away, and Mr. Sami had no idea where he was now. So I sent one of the researchers along with the same driver who took us once to Kirkuk to



fetch Batal and search for “M”. For your information, I had a very strong relationship with “M” as he was raised in my personal home and carries my name, which is what pained me the most. In any case, I will leave out the details of “M”’s story and return to Batal. Upon bringing Batal to the **Safe Home**, he felt guilty and ashamed of what he had done, not knowing how to atone for his mistakes as he didn’t know the appropriate wording to use in such a situation. Thus, he kept smiling in a way that made me feel like he was crying. He knew full well that nothing could excuse his actions; especially after all I had given him. He tried to atone for his actions by returning the amount he had left, and confessed everything: whose idea it was to run away, their purpose in running away to Kirkuk, what they did with the money, and where they were headed. He clarified everything, but the one thing that pained me most was it had been “M”’s idea, after I had personally raised him in my home and given him everything. The subject came to an end, however I broke off my relationship with Batal for a long period of time. This form of punishment had a large impact on Batal as well as the other children, and I used it often with them. Later, once I felt that Batal had reached a point of regret and repentance that prevented him from even considering the thought of running away again, I began to gradually rebuild our relationship without showing him that I was completely satisfied with him or that I had forgotten about the incident completely. It was the most difficult situation I faced in my relationship with Batal and “M”. Thereafter, I dismissed the **Safe Home** office manager because he did not abide by working hours. I charged Batal with carrying out his duties and taking on the office’s responsibilities. He remains the



office manager to this day, and he also trains the other children how to use computer programs seeing as he is now proficient in using them. Although Batal had only been educated to the 9th grade level, his passion for this specialty drove him to outdo even himself. Today, he is a designer and photographer, and provides all of the **Safe Home's** needs, from taking photos, working on Photoshop, giving training courses, enlarging and printing photographs, and printing all correspondence. I also ensured he was appointed permanently at the Ministry of Oil, and built a small house for him as he gets ready to be married soon, God-willin.



Abqari's Story:



Abqari is the youngest child at the **Home**. He entered our Safe Home in 2005 when he was no more than 5 years old. He has a very slim and tiny body, a big head, and prominent ears. The latter two features in particular are considered signs of intelligence in our Iraqi society. Abqari used to live with his mother, who suffers from mental illness, begs on the streets of Baghdad all day, and sleeps anywhere she reaches after a long day of walking on foot along with her young child, from whom she is inseparable. This is one of the reasons why we were late in bringing him to the **Home**, even though we had already brought his two older stepbrothers. The stepbrothers did not have fathers, because the mother had had several 'urfi marriages (marriage contract that is not registered with state authorities), producing three boys and one girl, all of whom were on the streets. Abqari's older



siblings are homeless and addicted to inhaling solvents (such as paint thinner) and adhesives (such as Seccotine). The older brother is also addicted to narcotic drugs bought from the pharmacy when the money from begging allows it. There must even be particular pharmacies that provide the drugs in the Bataween area near Bab Al Sharqi, or in other areas.

Abqari did not know anyone else other than his mother. He did not think about his needs as a child, nor did he compare himself to other children he met on the street as they went to school or walked through the market with their parents or wore nice clothes for Eid or visited amusement parks. None of these things held any meaning for him as he lived in an environment that he considered normal. The only scene that became familiar to him on the streets was when passerby's would give them their charity and their pity, and even then, they would give mostly upon the sight of Abqari, young and frail in his mother's arms. Thus, the mother was firmly holding on to him because he was an important source of livelihood for her on the streets. The mother stayed mostly in Al Sadriya area in the center of the capital Baghdad, and Bab Al Sharqi. The first reason she chose those areas is because they fall on the route to three main shopping centers: Bab Al Sharqi, Al Shorjah, and Hafeth Al Qadhi. The second reason is because the residents of these areas have come to know her and became familiar with her presence. They used to help her out of pity for Abqari, and her mental condition. For those same two reasons, we insisted on bringing the child into our **Safe Home**, out of fear from life on the streets, and after having confirmed that his mother is unable to take care of him because of her condition.

The Field Survey team set out for Al Sadriya area to bring Abqari, but each time they went, the mother refused to give him up. Abqari would also get scared of the researchers and refuse to leave his mother, with whom he had never parted before. And each time, the residents



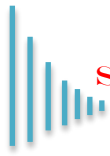
of the area would intervene and prevent the team from taking Abqari, fearing that they were trying to kidnap him. One day, the team went to the people in the area and convinced them of what we were doing and our intention to house the child in a safe place, taking along Abqari's brothers to help make their point. It worked, and people supported us as the team brought back Abqari to the **Safe Home**. There was no strong bond between Abqari and his two other brothers despite Abqari's attachment to them. They did not reciprocate his feelings, and were often harsh on him, particularly the middle brother who was aggressive and would also attack the older brother. Abqari had a hard time adapting to the environment at the **Safe Home**, first because of his young age and distance from his mother, and second because he constantly ran away from the Home, and we would always chase after him and bring him back. What made our job easier is the **Home's** location away from residential areas, as we were surrounded with office buildings occupied by Government departments, and were located close to the highway. Abqari was afraid of the speeding cars, which worked in our favor when we had to chase him. Amusingly, Abqari's small size enabled him to leave the **Home** through a small opening in the main door, one that we never expected to consider an escape outlet for the children! He would usually run towards the main road, except that he wouldn't know where he was heading, simply trying to get as far away from the **Home** as possible, before we caught up to him and returned him. Abqari soon became the **Home's** spoiled child and the focus of everyone's attention. He started to assimilate with the other children and adapt to his new situation with the absence of his mother, who had also become used to his absence and resumed her daily routine. After a while, Abqari started going to school and was very happy to do so. He showed great achievement in his studies starting from his first year, which made us pay even more focus and attention to him,



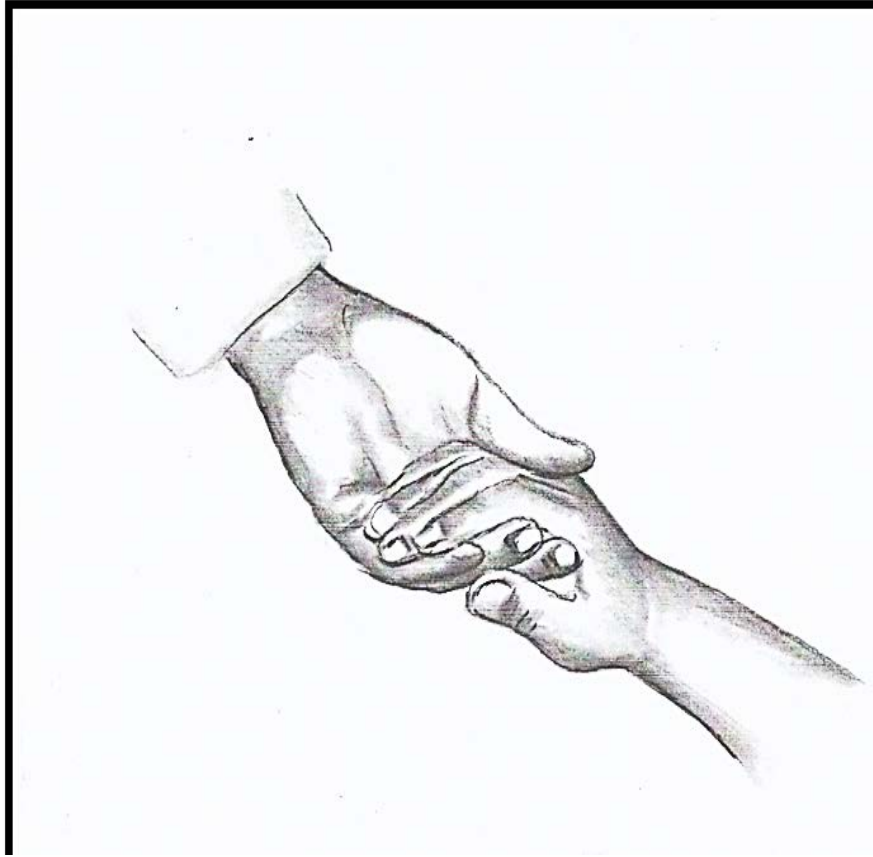
earning him his nickname “Abqari” (Genius). We anticipated a bright future for him. He was then incorporated into the Iraqi Swimming Federation because of his swimming talent. It was commonly known that most street children were talented swimmers as they would always swim in the river Dijlah to escape the summer heat. Abqari’s middle stepbrother also swam with the Federation, surpassing all of his peers and impressing his coaches by winning first place locally, beating others representing clubs across Iraq. His coaches expected a bright future for him. However, he stopped swimming when his stepsister collected him from the **Safe Home**. We refused to hand over Abqari to her as well out of concern for him, having knowing her past and knowing she is not to be trusted with Abqari. Our hunch was confirmed, and the middle brother was homeless again on the streets after a while of leaving the **Home**. Unfortunately, we could not receive him again after he had gone back to his addiction and was rendered dangerous to the project and the other children. As for Abqari, he became a talented swimmer and continued to practice with a number of children from the **Home**, until we had a disagreement with the Federation over their exploitation of our children. They gave a full stipend to ‘normal’ children, but they gave only half of the amount to our children, which awfully enraged me. So we left the sport and the Federation and focused only on education. After that, we parted with Kurdistan Save the Children for the reasons mentioned earlier, but our work with the children continued. Abqari continued to receive special care and great attention as we counted on him in his studies. And he didn’t let us down. He passed each academic level with honors, and completed the secondary school level. During this time, he had developed a great interest in cooking, and became the **Home’s** personal chef. He chose to continue his preparatory-level studies in Al Siyyah Institute, in the culinary program. We did not oppose his wishes, in fact



we encouraged him to start the program and tried our best not to impose anything on him. I wish that all families would follow this example with their children's desires and dreams. Parents shouldn't take decisions for their children; rather, they should discuss and mutually agree together on the decisions that will shape their future.



Mahthooth's Story:



I named him Mahthooth (lucky) because he had a chance that not even the best children who lived with their families had. He earned his nickname and I will leave it up to you, after telling you his story, to decide whether he was lucky or not. After two years of working with homeless children in our **Safe Home** project in Al Saidiya area South of Baghdad, we were able to successfully change many of the children's characteristics and temperaments. Our project started to make an impact, and people began to enquire about us, recognize us, and wanted to know what we were doing and how we dealt with a segment of society that is stubborn, and requires specialized individuals to understand them, change their behavior, and ease their integration into society. One individual who heard about our project and wanted to observe it was "Sh. W.," director of the House of



Compassion for the Care of Homeless Children in Al Rashad area in East Baghdad. Sh. W. was a turban-clad sheikh who received the project after the fall of the Saddam regime and the entry of American troops into Baghdad. After observing our project and the way we work and the services we provide, he invited me to visit the place that he manages in Al Rashad area. I accepted his invitation and promised that I would visit as soon as I could. I fulfilled my promise after a few days' time. The house that Sh. W. ran was very spacious, but wasn't used to its full capacity. It needed to be repaired. There were clear signs of negligence and vandalism. I noticed that there were individuals who were over 20 years old, and there was a separated space for girls over 15. When I asked about their situation, Sh. W. explained that they marry the boys to the girls, creating families and ending their problems. I was not convinced, and came to the painful realization that these young men marry the girls in a 'urfi marriage (marriage contract that is not registered with state authorities), and after a while they leave them, usually pregnant and give birth to babies without fathers because they have no proper documented evidence of their marriages.

Another thing that drew my attention there was a boy, almost 10 years old, wearing very short shorts and a very tight-fitting t-shirt. Despite his messy appearance, he wore a big smile so I asked him for his name. Sh. W. answered me instead and left me no chance to talk to the boy. I asked him later to allow me to bring the boy to our **Home** because his presence with the older boys is a danger to him, particularly so since I knew that most of them had criminal encounters with addiction, theft, robbery, and begging, even sexual and physical harassment against others. I wanted to save him from from his environment except Sh. W. vehemently refused. He then asked me to come into his office, where he told me that he is thinking of handing over the project to me, given my experience with homeless children and my



ability to develop the place and turn it around. I told him that I wouldn't mind, and that I would like to fix up the place. However, he surprised me with a strange request when he said: The project cost me more than \$1000 USD, therefore, he continued, I will give it up to you in return for this amount, and I won't ask you for anything more than what I spent on it. I was shocked that he offered to sell something to me that belonged to the State, and he in return only provided destruction and failed management. I refused the offer and walked out after telling him that I am a volunteer on a stipend of \$50 USD per month.

I left the place and returned to the **Safe Home**. As I was leaving, I noticed that the young boy was watching me, and his image stuck with me. I had decided to bring him to the **Safe Home** no matter what it cost. Shortly thereafter I found him knocking our door, asking for permission to come in. I was overwhelmed with joy to see him, especially since I had been thinking about him constantly since that encounter. This is Mahthooth (Lucky), to whom Heaven's doors opened up and he was reborn in a new, safe place where he could achieve all his dreams after he had been the most miserable child due to the terrible conditions he lived in the several shelters he had entered in his lifetime. He had spent half of his life in State shelters (which are paramount to juvenile prisons), and by entering into our **Home**; he left behind all his past tragedies. Mahthooth quickly assimilated with the rest of the children, as they would fawn over any new child that enters the **Home**, and particularly if he has any special characteristics. Mahthooth was a handsome, talented singer, and had a charismatic personality that endeared everyone from researchers to children. I became very close to him and made him a close friend of mine. I gave him affection and a sense of safety, and took him to my house almost everyday. He accompanied me in everything I did, which greatly boosted his self-esteem and gave him the psychological reassurance and safety



that he had lacked in past years. He started to tell me about his past, and his trip from Basra to Baghdad and the agony he faced. He used to live with his mother in Al Basra province in the South of Iraq. He knew nothing of his father. When he was 5 years old, according to him, his mother had a fire accident and died as a result. A neighboring family took him in but treated him harshly and abusively. They used to beat him and burn him constantly for no reason. At 7 years old, he decided to run away from them and head to Baghdad, where he heard from street children that it was a beautiful city where he can live in peace. In Baghdad, he spent a while on the streets in Al Nahda area. Al Nahda is one of the centers of Baghdad with a large garage that transports people to all the Iraqi provinces. One day, one of the construction workers who gather there in the early morning spotted him on the street. The construction worker lived in Al Sadr city, and decided to take the boy home with him to live with him and take care of him. However, he didn't stay long there because of the wife's opposition to his presence in the house, to the point where the man had to consider how to get rid of him. So Mahthooth decided to leave the house and return to the streets. One day, a police car stopped next to him, led him to the car, and drove him to a place he did not know. The policemen told him that they were transporting him to an orphanage with a lot of children his age. When he arrived at the place, he found that it was a prison. They had taken him to a juvenile prison and left him there, where he received the worst treatment from physical and verbal abuse, in addition to hunger. His suffering continued there for several more years that I prefer to keep to myself and not share with anyone, as he entrusted me with the horrors he faced there. In 2003 the U.S. forces invaded Baghdad and released juvenile prisoners to the streets; 'Lucky' was one of them, many of them travelled reaching to 'Daar Arrahma' then into our Safe House and he is with me now telling his story. I have grown fond of him to the



stage that I never lose sight of him; I was taking care of him as if he was a child of my own. After a while I managed to obtain legal documents and was able to adopt him and give him my name, it is a fabulous humane gesture how my children would count him in when asked about how many siblings they had; which made it evident that he was like one of my children. Before I separated from 'Kurdistan Save The Children' organisation we used to take the children to learn swimming, most of them were really good swimmers already as they swam in the Tigris river nearly every day. In order to make the activity more serious and beneficial for the children of the future, we have reached to an agreement with the National Swimming Association to consider taking some of them as professional Athlete swimmers and indeed they managed to do so, and our children have joined them in their daily training.

In 2007 I left KSC, the activity continues and evolved as the children took part in national competitions scoring first places, one of them was Lucky; as he scored first place nationally, not having legal documents stopped the children from competing and train internationally. After heavy effort and a lot of dedication, we managed to provide the children with legal documents by the end of 2007; it took a very long time due to the people in authority being unresponsive and unhelpful showing no support to the cause. During that time Lucky was in secondary school, he was an outstanding student, clean, well behaved and at the same time we were filming a documentary about our Safe Home and our daily lives, everything was going as planned especially after we obtained the legal documents for the children, but that harmony did not last long; as we were surprised one morning that Lucky and one other child had ran away and stolen some money from the house safe, it was a big shock as we were not prepared for such event to take place at that time, knowing the fact that they have not faced any issues in the house and do not have any foes in



there, as a matter of fact; we have not ever heard them complain about anything during their long stay in the Safe House. It is impossible to forget the time they have spent in this place and run to the streets, regardless of how much money they stole, they know it will run out sooner or later and their destiny would be unknown without the Safe House and me. The story of his escape and return ends, it was mentioned as a part of the story of (Hero) whom he took with him as he escaped. He didn't easily return, instead he ran away from my relatives in Kirkuk as he felt ashamed of what he did and returned to Baghdad again, but he did not return to us. I was in contact with him as I had his mobile phone number, I tried to convince him to return from 14:00 till late hours of the night, after I managed to convince him to return he wasn't able to due to the late time of the night and he could not find a taxi to drop him as it was a very dangerous time in Baghdad and people had to abide the curfew from 12:00 am till the morning, therefore we were forced to wait till the morning until he actually returned, he was tired, dirty and regretful, you could see it in his face. He did not return to the Safe House, instead he returned to my personal home as he didn't want the other children to see him, he did not want to be confronted and grounded in front of them; knowing the fact that I always provided him with everything he needed. Therefore he preferred coming to my house and hear what I have to say to him without anyone else knowing.

After this event, things changed between us, Lucky is not a child or a spoilt teenager in the Safe House, he became a regular person, and sometimes even less as I figured that I should have not provided him with everything when he had nothing at all, and I should have given it to him gradually rather than all at once, as I know that I could have spoilt him by showing him too much attention, therefore I had to recalculate and plan another approach with him in order to change his lifestyle, at this stage I



focused on his education as he was in year 9, a part of all the pressures he could not pass this level, he failed the first year and we reached to an agreement with him that he will compensate in the following year after we started working hard with him, we assigned private tutors in most subjects but he still wasn't able to pass his entry to the final exams, knowing that it's a Bachelorious stage in the education and he is not allowed to set them if he has failed 3 or more subjects. At this stage we did heroic work in partnership with many others as we obtained exclusive offer from the Minister of education, allowing him to resit his final exams regardless of him failing 5 other subjects and it is an order from the third Head of education of Rasafa District.

After our independence I began working as an electrical worker with cars with one of my friends. As mentioned before, in addition to his work he studied evenings and reached third grade the same as his (Middle) brother. He continued studying the same time as working because his build was weak and he wasn't strong enough for the work. He stood out for his quiet demeanour and reluctance to speak - as he had no problems to speak of. This was the opposite of his (the) older brother who was always causing problems due to his lack of awareness which was unbecoming of his age and size, in addition to his slyness and meanness which he excelled in.

One situation he was famous for and we kept talking about for more than a month was when on one of the days he came to me early in the morning claiming that his wallet was stolen while he was sleeping the previous night and that there was 50,000 dinar inside it. So I got up immediately and got a group of children up too and I started instructing them and searching with them for a long time to no avail despite searching the whole house. Then he told me that one of the children saw (Gh) the younder brother, lifting the carpet on the ground floor and they were not sure what he was doing. So I went



straight there, and when the younger brother spotted me the colour of his face changed and he started stuttering as he spoke. When I got into the room, I asked all of the teenage (kids) to lift up their beds and pull the carpets out from under them and was shocked to see the wallet there. It became apparent to us that he had planned the whole thing so that he would get the money from me. He clearly believed that after declaring that his hard earned money was stolen from him and after a little crying that we would sympathise with him and give him the money (as planned). Especially as I had done this before, even though the amount was only 5000 dinar then.

After this incident he changed his ways because he realised that he would lose a lot as a result of this lie and that we would not sympathise with him because he loves himself and lacks any responsibility. He began trying to get closer to us and doing his daily duties without objection, such as cleaning or washing clothes or tidying the house or washing dishes. But it was certain that he did not do all of this from a position of remorse and atonement but from a position of attempting to improve his image in preparation for returning to past practices – he is an exploitative and opportunistic person who does not think of others and only wants to get his own benefits out of a relationship. Despite all these disadvantages, we strived with all of our efforts to get civil documents (birth certificate, passport, ID) for him and his brother. We were successful in this however, it was only temporary because we were unable to acquire the civil registry for their father and we did not know in which way the fathers' wife would behave after the father left her, if she gains any reason/excuse for guardianship on the brothers. Alongside these brothers, there were 19 other children and teenagers at our safe home all with temporary documentation. We try to get this for all of the children so that they have some form of ID. We work incredibly hard to get their original documents for them so that they have some form of original ID – so we try to



get them from temporary papers to full paperwork. The purpose of all of this is to enable the children to get into schools and to travel around the country or even out of the country when required. They have all progressed to becoming actors or artists and as a result they get invitations to festivals or shows that are outside of Iraq.

The important thing is that we acquire full ID evidence for the brothers including ID cards and a Certificate of Iraqi citizenship and an Iraqi passport. This is only a small part of our achievements. As the minister of labour and social affairs told me at the time, "I swear you are a hero Hisham! How did you manage to get all of the childrens' civil documentation?" And at the same time the head of the Kurdistan Save the Childrens organisation that we were a part of upon opening the safe home, during my visit to him told me "that our organisation is affiliated with the President of Iraq's (Jalal Talabani) wife and even we could not get all of these documents for children" .After acquiring all of this, getting them into school was easy, and I began to think of getting them governmental careers.

That is exactly what happened, as we managed to get a position designated for the older brother (G) In the Ministry of Energy and the younger brother (KH) in the Interior Ministry. After a while we thought of marriage for the older brother once he reached the age of 21 - which is too old for him to remain in the "Safe Home" amongst the children. But we of course refused to put him out on the streets. He works from the morning to the evening anyway which keeps him away from the children, so the only solution was to keep him in our home. We impose some kind of a program on all of the "elders" in the home. The idea of marriage made the issue of not having possession of ID documentation re-arise and so we decided to get a solicitor on the case for the purpose of acquiring all of the relevant documents for us. The solicitor required a fee of 50million dinar and we were forced to agree to pay this (there wasn't much room for



negotiation), so she started work immediately. In her own way she was able to find the address of the fathers' wife who became very afraid when she was found. It became apparent that the reason she was afraid was because she had sold all of the fathers' property (estate) and excluded the sons from their legal entitlements through committing fraud that could be punishable by several years' imprisonment. But we did not want to escalate the situation as we are not government officials nor did we have the power to enforce any punishment. After a year and a half we were able to acquire enough documentation for all of the brothers and we began the process of getting the older one married and acquiring a home for him to rent – for which we covered his rent for one year and furnished the entire house for him. Despite how much he had saddened both me and the workers in the home, we cared for him for years, we fought against all of his defences, and to get all of his civil documentation to secure his future. In return for all of this, he doesn't ask about us unless he needs something or is faced with a problem, and he never thinks of anyone but himself, and never contacts his brother in the home or the other brother who lives in the government home. And for information, when I handed over the youngest brother to the ministry of Labour and Social affairs – I coloured a phrase in red to distinguish it if it turns out later that they placed him in a juvenile home and wouldn't enter him into the orphanage because he didn't have any civil documentation (ID).

The Juvenile homes have both older and younger teens, they also have teenagers who have served sentences but have no one to go to after they have done so. They also have runaways (displaced people) who were (have been) arrested on the street and generally have a mixture of kids from a variety of backgrounds (and experiences) – and they often have conflicts between each other. The child (the youngest brother) was still 'fresh' – and lacked any experience – and it was better to put him in an



orphanage than a juvenile home. I did not keep quiet about the situation (that they placed him in a juvenile home) and wrote about it to the Minister of Labour at the time Mohammed Alsheikh Rathi and I pointed out to him the phrase that requests he be returned to us (as highlighted above). He agreed without any opposition and wrote to the manager of the state home requesting that she transfers him (m) from the juvenile home to the Iraqi Safe Home for Orphans. However, she refused to do so and ridiculed the minister and said "this guy has no idea about how to transfer kids from one home to another" - and he seemed to have just taken the criticism with no follow up. I am by bringing in the story of the youngest brother trying to draw a comparison between what we have done for the two older brothers and what the ministries have done for the youngest brother. They did not make anything available to him and have not done anything to protect him because he was exposed to physical, sexual and emotional abuse for the entire time he was in the home. He also developed a lot of bad traits from his time amongst the teenagers and children who had committed crimes (petty crimes). From our perspective we gave the brothers everything - attention and care, education, Civil documents, careers, marriage and stability in a home where they could depend on themselves and others. If you leave these children in prisons (juvenile homes) with no plan or daily program or any form of development or rehabilitation, the whole time they stay there they will view it as a hotel for eating and sleeping, and the impact of the problems between them and the assault they commit on each other (and that is often committed on them) - and this includes physical, emotional, sexual and verbal, which are almost a daily occurrence, is immense and often irrecoverable.

I come back now to the project to get the older brother married and how I convinced families to marry their daughter to a young man who spent half of his life outside of Iraq and the other half in an orphanage, and who does



not have any documents nor does he have a family or a tribe as he had been abandoned by everyone. What was hard about this task and what concerned us the most was knowledge on the tribes, and their traditions and their familial reputation. We did not give up, we continued the search and commissioned our friends and acquaintances to help us with this task. One day one of my friends contact me and said to me "I know you are looking to get one of the (orphan) boys married from your home?" so I said to him "yes" and was eager to hear the rest of what he had to say, he said that he had met with a woman and began to describe the specifics of the situation, "she is an orphan too and she lives with her uncles and they are very nice people and could possibly be open to marrying her to one of the boys". So we agreed on a day and went to visit them and they seemed to be very respectful and simple people. They asked a few questions to clarify the boys (GH) situation and his story and where he came from. Our answers were honest and clear and they sympathised a lot with his story and so it was agreed between us to determine a time for the engagement (to happen very soon). I cannot describe our happiness because we viewed this as a long march to an accomplishment for humanity, which has been going on for years and during which we faced many hurdles and worries and fatigue!

I come back to the topic of acquiring the official documentation. The solicitor was able to infer the original record of the father and was then able to acquire his new wifes address. Even though she was (the wife) unwilling to help us or acknowledge the boys, we were at least able to get their uncles address in Baghdad. He was also unwilling to offer us anything even when summoned to court for the purpose of providing information he did not attend except when he was forced. This was something used on people popular in their area and who belonged to strong tribes. It took us eight taxis back and forth and after a while we were able to acquire the



documentation in full (ID cards, and certificate of Iraqi citizenship).

We then began the wedding celebrations after I found a home to rent for them (the couple) in Sadr City, and we started to furnish the place and provided them with all of the essentials. It was a historic day from our perspective. We had achieved something that the state, with all its power, couldn't do. Despite our limited potential and our dependence on hand outs (from those who could afford it) we achieved this. It is also true that quite often we (lack funds) to the point that I cook dinner in my home and take it to the safe home. This achievement definitely gave us a positive energy and momentum to do even more work and have many more achievements. Even with the knowledge that (KH) the older brother was thankless and almost spoilt our joy and happiness more than once due to this, our solace was the success we had achieved against all of the odds. After we finished with the story of (kh) the older brother we moved to (gh) the middle brother who had reached the end of middle school. By accident we had a meeting with a senior member from the interior ministry (Adnan Al-Asadi) and we requested from him that he helps us by appointing three of our young men who are over 18 (to jobs) because we wished to provide them with stability and secure their futures. I requested that he appoints them within the Interior Ministry as Community Police as this section faces less danger and has a relationship with the work of civil society organisations. As well as this, their work is conducted in civilian attire and not military attire. He agreed and got them work very promptly. It was only a matter of days before we were contacted to finalise their paperwork so that they could start work.

There was one final success to add to all of our successes and achievement. For your information we began trying to appoint two of the older boys with him (the brother). After they received their first salary we opened a bank account for them and we agreed with them that they each



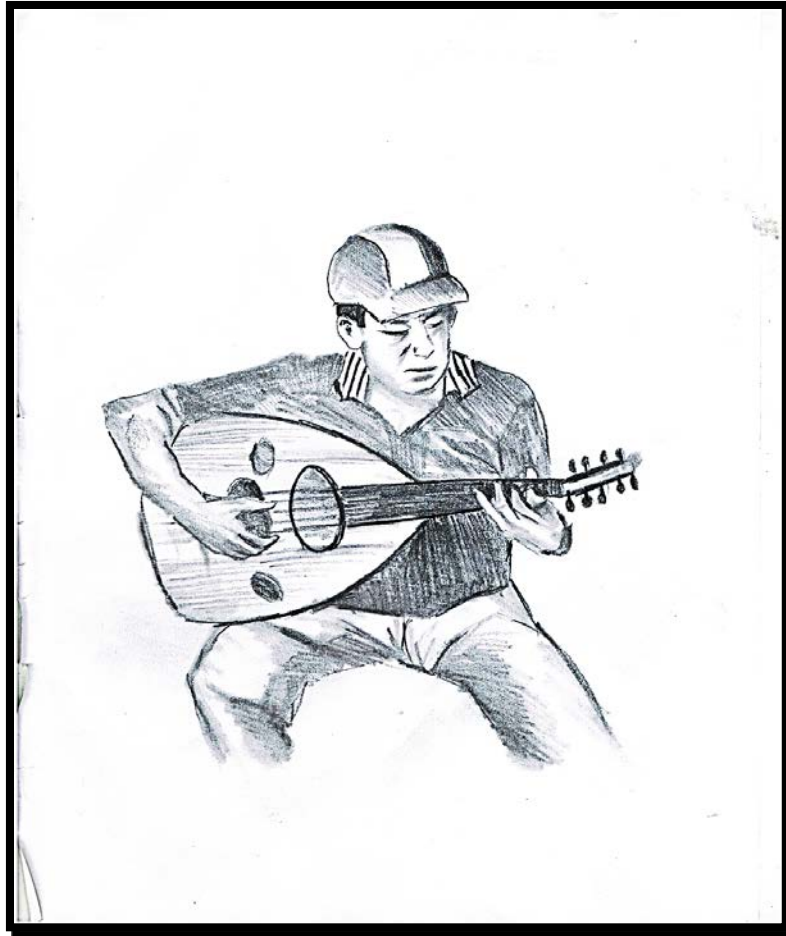
start putting aside half of their salary to be saved for spending on marriage and to protect their future.

Amongst his peers who were also appointed, (GH) was very generous and amongst the remaining children in the safe home he would each time he receives his salary divide a portion amongst them. They would each wait for this gift every month.

Also for information, we made them (place a condition on them) that they would put aside a small amount of their salary for the boys in the home who used to work as a cook in our safe home and (GH) was the best out of all of the boys in terms if sticking to this condition without stopping as opposed to the others – this showed he was a person who was a team-player, and he thinks of others and isn't selfish or stingy. The start of (GH's) career had a big impact on his outlook on life and it changed a lot of previous inhibitions, he woke up a new person who now feels responsibility and thinks of ways to develop himself and he began to think about taking his younger brother out of the juvenile home and taking him under his care. He also took it upon himself to put pressure on his older brother to help make this happen faster, he was paying his older brothers rent and so he gained the ability to be able to tell him what to do and have his voice heard. When meeting with him, we would give him certain tasks to do for us (we depended on him) such as accompanying the kids to school now and then for children whose schools didn't have carers/support workers specific to them. Because we divided the students and the schools, the schools requested that someone would travel with each group of children, for this reason we asked (Gh) to accompany the kids if on any occasion the support workers did not show up to work. The schools security guard got to know him and on one of the days he visited us at our home and requested to see me. He introduced himself and said to me "Hisham, sir, I have heard a lot about you and your reputation is very good and you have one of your boys on the brink of marriage who seems to



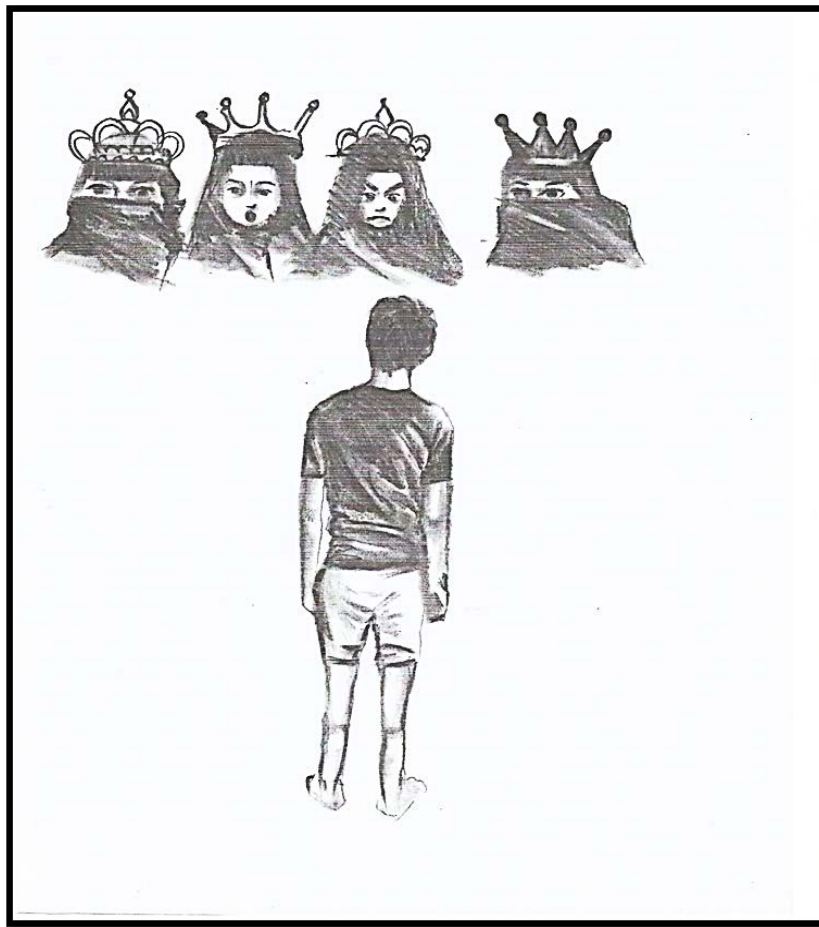
be very respectful and well-mannered and he proposed one of his daughters hand in marriage (to him)” He said I could ask about him in the area and gave me his address and telephone number and left. I was very surprised by this.few days passed and I began to arrange a get together for all the support workers (a meeting) for the purpose of discussing the marriage of (Gh) especially because we began the building of the house we called “The Golden Nest” – which had 3-floors for the purpose of marrying boys from the “Iraqi Safe Home” who after the commencement of their careers became men who are able to depend on themselves. So I received approval for his marriage and another one of our sons. So we went to the house of the gentleman who proposed the idea of marriage (the security guard) and it turned out that they were a nice family and their reputation was good and so we left it in Gods’ hands and asked for one of his daughters hand in marriage – after the marriage and until now they have been settled in the “Golden Nest”. In regards to the youngest brother who was taken from us by the government, he is not stable nor does he have any of his Civil ID documents and he often even ends up sleeping on the street. If a dispute arises between him and the older brother who doesn’t think of anyone or care about anyone but himself. So I leave the reader with the comparison of what we with what little we have achieved with the older brothers (Kh and Gh) and



what the government have achieved (or not) with the younger brother.



The Story of Ashur (Ashur's story)



When I remember some of the stories of the children (runaways) who came under our care in the Safe Home at the beginning of the year 2004 after the entry of the US armed forces to Iraq and the opening of prisons for juveniles and the growth of both teenagers and children living on the streets, I get a strange feeling. Now I get a feeling of pride because I was able to get them into safety. I also feel helpless because I didn't succeed with all of the kids and I lost or failed a lot of them. As well, I get a feeling of combined happiness and grief, strength and weakness, optimism and despair because I lived with them for years and I knew everything about them and all of their secrets and I gained their trust...I don't consider this a measure of my success because the relationship between us is based on trust and this is the hardest thing



for them because they do not trust anyone unless they are sure that person has good intentions. We also discussed their stories and tragedies and the reasons for them running away and the way life has been cruel to them, and both the communities' renunciation of them and their hatred of community. We also discussed why they hate everything that is nice and good. I found out about their situations during my relationship with them and they entrusted me with this information because they are intelligent young men and they know the people that love them for real from the people who pretend to take advantage of them. I was very happy I gained their trust and I became their close friend – but I was also sad because I didn't provide all that they required nor did I get their rights recovered and I was unable to even requires for their most basic rights such as the ID documents that they were prevented from because their families do not have any humanity or mercy and nor do they care for anything but satisfying their own needs without acquiring their childrens rights or security. So my responsibility was a huge one – me and those who were able to work with me – and this is depicted in the development of their trust in themselves first and then in others.

At the same time I worked on their involvement in the community which was the hardest requirement so that the community changes their view of them – which is a view of inferiority. This was the prevailing view members of the community had of children on the streets. To add to this the hard work of erasing the memories of the situations which they lived through when they were in their family homes or on the streets or in juvenile prison. Those are painful memories which left emotional scars on them.

Most of the children were from broken homes/families – for example: the mother and the father are divorced and the father remarried and the mother remarried and the fathers' wife does not want the child and so mistreats



them. And so they end up on the streets. Or the mother takes them in and her husband who has all of the power abuses them and they likewise end up on the streets.

Sometimes the kids go to either their maternal or paternal grandparents who are unable to care for them or provide for them due to their old age or financial situation and again the child ends up on the street. This is with respect to the children from broken families. And on the streets life is different, when children end up there they meet with others who are in similar situations and who have faced abuse from their families, and they experience even worse abuse than they had ever faced before. These children are from two varieties: either they are aggressive and violent and can keep up with the kids on the street and can understand them which makes mixing with the children easier and allows them to have a bit more freedom. OR they are weak and fall prey to those other (Stronger) children and are exposed to violence (abuse) emotionally, physically and sexually. And they develop mental health problems and begin to view themselves with inferiority and a feeling that everyone is against them, and so they punish others and begin to battle against everyone. These series of violations continue until the child finds himself in Juvenile Prison facing several charges including: begging, stealing, fighting and committing sexual abuse (or rape) which lead to several years or months in prison. And so the child becomes a subscribed victim in the killing of his soul, along with his family and the collective government. And so I come to the story of our friends, Ashur, who was considered a 'model' of persecution and the destruction of one's soul, and broken thoughts, and a lack of belief and trust in oneself, and humiliation to the point that even until now he stands with shyness. This is because despite all of the situations of success and stability and safety, he remembers the past and reaching his wits end and anxiety. This stubborn child handled things above his abilities, and it is enough that he lived with a careless



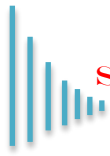
father with four wives who were neglecting and mean and they dictated how his life should be. A child can barely handle cruelty at the hand of one of his fathers' wives let alone four of them! Ashur, the child, handled living for 8 years with a father who had divorced his mother and married four women aside from her, and all of them had children. And Ashur would do all of the duties of the household in the absence of his father. He even washed clothes and washed the children after they used the toilet. The work he did was a lot for a child who was only 8 at the time. All of this work was usually accompanied with insults and shouting and cursing. And the most thing that hurts him the most was the constant insulting of his mother and the beating that occurred with or without reason. All of this work happened in the absence of his father. After he (the father) became used to the work he views everything as normal and that it is enhancing or developing him. If he threatened to tell the father he would face severe punishment – so he would remain quiet. He would be sad but he kept quiet because he knew that his father would not do anything to deter them anyway. Ashur did not know where his mother went – they told him when he was a child that she went to the market and would come back soon. Because of this he would sit by the window watching the road waiting for the return of his mother. When her absence grew longer, he would take every opportunity to look out of the window hoping that his mother may remember him and would come back to him. Until he realise the futility of this.

So his suffering continued amongst the four wives and his seven siblings, and he would have to handle the meanness and the difficulty and exhaustion of handling caring for all of the children. This was of course a situation beyond his capacity and requires someone with a mental capacity and build to handle these situations. Because often when an adult deals with even less than these situations would either reach suicide or kill the



person committing it on him, and that would be a foregone conclusion.

Ashur had been living in a village on the outskirts of Diyala called (K), which was so far from the city's center that it was possible the Iraqi government did not know of its existence. The village inhabitants lived in houses made of mud and straw, and most of them were farmers. Ashur's father would wake up at the crack of dawn to work the fields till nightfall, leaving Ashur at the mercy of his four wives. Far from acting as replacements for Ashur's mother, his four stepmothers were extremely cruel and mean towards him. Ashur would beg his father to let him accompany him to the fields but his father would always refuse, stating that Ashur was his stand-in at home and he was responsible for carrying out his wives' orders as well as helping out with taking care of their children. Fortunately for Ashur, he had an aunt who lived in the Bab-El-Sheikh area, where the shrine of Sheikh Abdel Kader Al Kaylani lay. Ashur would plead and beg to be allowed to visit her, and once there, he would run away from his aunt to take to the streets to beg and spend the nights in Sheikh Abdel Kader Al Kaylani's shrine. He managed to earn a meagre living selling trinkets to the many Iraqi and non-Iraqi visitors to the shrine. Thus he spent his days begging, loitering, and snorting, as well as smoking. People in that area knew him, and would often give him simple errands, like asking him to move things or sending him to buy something. In return, they would tip him as payment or out of the kindness of their hearts. He was content with the way things were, as it was better than being back home with his four stepmothers. One of the researchers came across Ashur while conducting a field survey in the Bab-El-Sheikh area, and he tried persuading him to accompany him to the "Safe House," but Ashur refused adamantly. The researcher kept trying to no avail. It was not until Ashur had been living in the "Safe House" for years that I finally realized the (justified) reasons for his



early refusal. When you succeed in escaping a prison, you think a thousand times before returning. For Ashur, all homes were prisons, for he had only known two: the home of his father, husband of four, and his aunt's house, with her alcoholic husband and her son who treated Ashur as his personal servant-boy. When speaking of his cousin, Ashur would say, "I didn't have a minute to rest. As soon as I'd finish one job, he'd send me on another." Despite his early refusal, the researcher kept trying. It may have been to Ashur's luck that he met this particular researcher, whose name is Taleb. It must be said of Taleb that he was a highly competent member of the research team who left an indelible mark on the project. Unfortunately, he did not remain on board due to clashes with the project's new administrator. A new director, claiming to be a certified doctor, was recruited for the project, and it was discovered afterwards that his credentials were forged. His reign was an unmitigated disaster, and under his so-called leadership, a humanitarian initiative turned into a spy project, where the children were taken advantage of to spy and deliver information. Taleb kept on to win Ashur's trust. We were incredibly lucky to have someone like Taleb, whose humanity and patience knew no bounds, and whose enormous reserves of empathy and refusal to give up finally won over Ashur and got him to agree to join the "Safe House." When Ashur first came to the "Safe House," he was quick-tempered and unable to interact in a positive manner with the other children. Due to the deprivation he suffered as a child, he would hoard things and refuse to share with others. Throughout his life, he was the last in line to receive care, love, and even food. One cold night, it was my turn to assume night duty at the home. The room where everyone slept was a large open living area with bunk beds, to accommodate over forty children. Usually whoever was on night duty would do an activity to amuse the children before bedtime, like quizzing the children or joking with them or watching a



TV program or telling them stories, which is what I loved most. To this day, the children love listening to and disappearing into the world of stories, especially if they talked about events and issues that had happened before. As I was putting them to bed and getting ready to tell them a story, Ashur called out to me, "Sir, come sleep next to me, I want to tell you my story!" He was on the top bunk, and I asked him, "How do I get up there?" and he told me, "I'll help you." Once I was up, I lay next to him and he began to tell me his story. He talked about the pain of losing his mother, his stepmothers' cruelty, and his father's neglect. One memory stood out in particular. One day, one of his father's wives had been preparing her children lunch, a dish of *u'roog* (homemade kebab and a very popular Iraqi dish). Tempted by the delicious smell, Ashur came into the kitchen and asked for a piece. His stepmother told him to 'get lost' and refused to give him a piece. Ashur then says he looked through the kitchen window and saw one of her own children walk up to her and ask for a piece, and she gave him one. "She gave her son and wouldn't give me one."

This memory stuck with Ashur, and lay behind his refusal to give up his turn during play, to leave a game even if he lost. Nor would he take for granted the freedom, love, affection, respect, and recognition we gave him, to make up for the years of deprivation he had suffered. When it came to his treatment, the first thing I needed to do was figure out what was Ashur's talent. In the meantime, I implemented certain measures to bolster his self-esteem and get the other children to accept his dominance over them. For example, I made him a captain of the football team, so he would not be replaced for a certain period of time as per norm. That gave me time to think of something else, and afterwards, I made him a supervisor of the electronic gaming room along with another child, and the two of them would take shifts during the morning and evening periods. I did this to buy time in order to figure out a radical solution for this particular child while



he adjusted to life at the house and there were fewer clashes between him and the other boys and researchers. During that time, I realized that Ashur drew in a style that set him apart from other children. Usually when asked to draw something, a child will draw objects or symbols they are familiar with, such as trees or houses or the Iraqi flag. Or he will copy the others. For these reasons, I reject the instruction/teaching process in the Arts and instead, I ask the child to draw anything he wants. No matter how basic the drawing, I will praise the child and encourage him to continue. One child ended up drawing the air conditioning unit complete with the wires and air socket with great accuracy. Ashur on the other hand would draw faces with zigzag lines, oversized heads and body parts disproportionally small compared to the head. The small body symbolized his feelings of inadequacy and need for help from others, and the oversized head reflected his ideas, emotions, and problems which threatened to overflow. He could not express his feelings, and thought others would not understand or be able to help. To encourage his artistic talents, I collaborated with the art workshop's leader Mrs. Nebras Hisham to produce an in-house magazine specially for the children. The "Safe House" magazine presented ideas, dreams, and themes/topics suggested by the children. Alongside each theme, we would display a painting by Ashur. Despite the magazine's simplicity, the response was very positive and Ashur especially was so proud of his accomplishments that he took to drawing anything and everything, even on the walls. Pleased with his progress and to encourage him further, I wrote down the children's stories and gave them each happy endings. We acted out those stories as a series of plays, and each child was the hero of his own story. Ashur excelled in acting and displayed a talent for comedic roles, which heightened everyone's enjoyment of the play. After some time, I proposed to the project's board members that we separate the teenagers from the younger children, to which they agreed. I ended up taking



ten children between the ages of 14 and 17 to our old headquarters in the Waziriya district, where we had lived previously before moving to our current home in Al-Seyidiya. The goal was to ensure the younger children's safety and allow them a greater degree of freedom and use of the home's facilities. The teenagers would previously monopolize the electronic games, football, TV, etc.. At the same time, I felt the teenagers needed more freedom and privacy, while simultaneously teaching them self-sufficiency and independence. They were not serious about schooling or interested in pursuing higher degrees, so we focused only on teaching them to read and write, and pushed them to learn handicrafts, to provide them with skills they can use in their daily lives. Ashur worked in various places but he did not settle into one particular profession as a result of his mood and numerous problems. In the end, he settled in a shop to rent tents and chairs for special occasions. He very much enjoyed his job because the shop owner loved and respected him dearly. During this time, I documented everything through photography and videos. This verification included the group meetings that regularly occurred as well as the individual meetings. The problems which occurred between them as well as filming them at work were documented. The purpose for these videos was to be able to archive the work so that we can return to it one day. In reality, we have regularly returned back to these stories and videos to act as motivation for others. Furthermore, the verification will support and confirm these stories. We have now started to look at ways to reunite Ashur with his original family either his father and wives or alternative relatives, usually being an aunt. Previously, in the past, the team dealing with reunification visited Ashur's father's home to discuss the possibility of returning Ashur to his home. We were able to agree with his father that he will visit us to observe his son, Ashur, so that Ashur can feel that his father is still concerned about his care. Ashur's father did



visit regularly and confirmed he will change his approach to dealing with his 4 wives as well as his poor son. Unfortunately, no changes occurred with his behavior and Ashur ran away from his father's home and returned to us. Therefore, we were forced into our second choice of letting him return to his Aunt's place as Ashur always remembered her in good stead. However, Ashur did not like his cousin, who regularly took advantage of him. We have therefore decided to work with his aunt and agreed with her in ways in which the living arrangements will occur so that they could live together harmoniously. After I visited Ashur's aunt, I discovered that she was financially unstable and had nobody to support her especially as her son is not the type to care for his family, on the contrary, he is lazy and relies on others. In fact, he was relying on his mother to feed and financially support him. Initially we considered obtaining income support from the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs since she deserved the support and fulfills the criteria to receive it. We were able to receive a salary for her and further reached an agreement with her that Ashur would continue to work and visit her on Thursdays and Fridays. After a while, he began visiting his aunt every other day until finally he started to visit her on a daily basis after finishing work. After a long time passed, he eventually found work near his aunt's home and therefore he quit his job in Sadr City. At the end, Ashur and others like him, need a touch of emotion even if it is just a little and a good intention to support them. In order to be successful this work needs patience and unaffiliated humanitarian assistance, so that the children can be active members within society.



The Story of Mohammed the Deaf



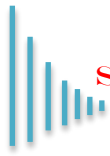
On one of the days, when one of the field surveyors of our Home of Safety was working which is to mainly to locate the positions of the street children in Bataween, they faced the strange case of a deaf, homeless child who the other street children would laugh at. He does not have the language skills to reply to the other children, however, he was found to be screaming and his voice would resonate across the streets. The people of the area became used to him and his screaming. I do not know how to describe the situation to you as just being a homeless is extremely difficult as a normal child who is able to experience all feelings and express emotions, let alone being deaf and mute. How does he deal with the situations on the streets? How does he go about his daily requirements? How does he communicate with the other children on the streets? How does he avoid the abuse of



gangs towards him? Being an extraordinary case these are questions that come to my mind as well as others. Importantly, the team left this case but continually monitored and met with the child. The process is hard to look after a child who is just a homeless, so this case was particularly difficult as he was deaf. The only means of communication with Mohammed was through sign language. Finding and working with a child who had a good relationship with Mohammed was agreed amongst the project management team. Through this, we are able to allow the children to take part in the field surveys, something beneficial for both parties as the children on the streets know their locations and understand each other. Through locating a friend of Mohammed, he was able to convince Mohammed in a unique way and within a short time, less than half an hour, Mohammed had agreed to our assistance. After asking the child what he had told Mohammed, he replied, "I told him that you know where his parents live and the team will return you to your house," the boy continued, "I understood from him [Mohammed] that he has been suffering on the streets, he became very happy when I told him that you knew where his family were." After we took him to the House of Safety he was initially dazed by the situation and was scared by the large number of children and young adults at the house, especially as they began to tease him. He would retaliate by shouting at them and make various offensive hand gestures whilst they continued to laugh at him. After he noticed that they continued to laugh at him, he changed his behavior to laugh amongst them, joke and play with them. From this, we found that he is a smart child and was able to convert the other children to his side and change the way in which they dealt with him. Mohammed started to interact with the other children and they themselves accepted him as one of them, getting used to his continual shouting as it is the only way he is able to communicate with others. Here the others began to communicate with him



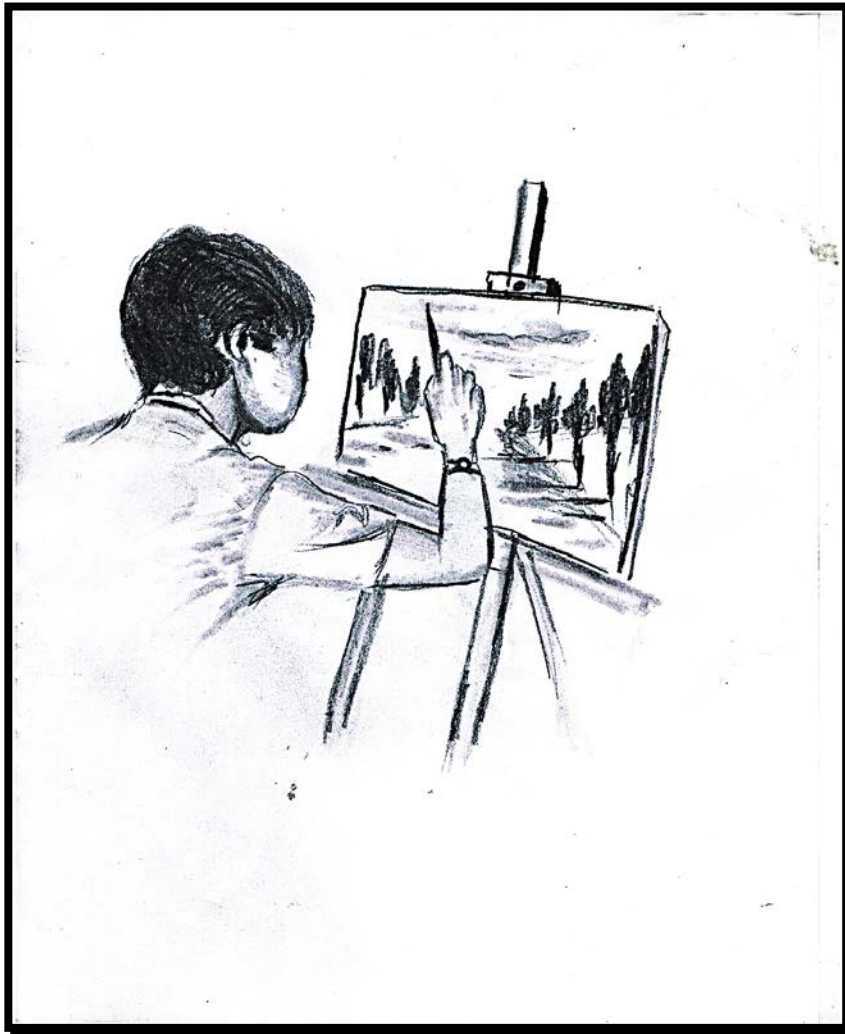
using sign language as if they were deaf like him, so much that the visitors of the House were unable to differentiate between who was deaf and not. This state continued as Mohammed got used to the other children as well as the researchers, care and support he received from the House of Safety. He has made good progress and started to interact with the children in most of their daily activities. One day, a group came knocking on the door asking for an interview with the Manager regarding an important issue. Speaking to the manager, they explained that they had lost a deaf child from the area approximately 2 years ago and had been told he was being cared for here. They gave a description matching Mohammed and Mohammed was brought to the office them and upon seeing this group, Mohammed was so surprised he began to hysterically scream before hugging each of them whilst crying. We asked the family how they had lost him, they said, "We live in Al-Mussayib and we have a yearly religious gathering to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain lasting 10 days or more. During the 10 days, Mohammed gives out food to the visitors at the gathering, however 2 years ago we had such a large number of guests that we did not notice that Mohammed had gone missing until the last day of the gathering. We had been told by a number of people who told us that they had spotted him with other pilgrims walking on his way to Karbala. They went to Karbala and continued to search for him for several months but with no success. We went to all the provinces in search of him but unfortunately did not find him. Each town we went to we were told he had been spotted elsewhere but eventually we began losing hope and put our fate in the hands of God. Two days ago, somebody told us that he had seen someone similar to Mohammed in Baghdad but was unable to confirm it as we was driving at the time. We went to that person but could not get any more news about Mohammed. We left our telephone numbers with the people concerned and return to the hotel. Last night



someone contacted us and explained that they knew of Mohammed's location and told us his story, guiding us to your location. We cannot thank you enough and wish that we can one day repay you for this great help." I told them that we had only provided our duty. As they were leaving with Mohammed, Mohammed looked back at us with a look of sadness and pain, eventually he began to cry before running to hug us one by one, both the children and the researchers. He told us through sign language that he will come back to visit us. The day we said our goodbyes to Mohammed was a day of sadness but also a happy day as we were able to unite Mohammed with his own family. Furthermore, his family were financially stable and well off.



The Story of Hussain



Whilst filming the documentary, "In My Mothers Arms" by the famous Iraqi filmmaker, Mohammed Al-Daraji in Palestine Street by Beirut square. I was recorded whilst talking to 2 homeless children attempting to convince to come with me to the orphanage. Whilst he was filming, other orphans were filmed on the square whilst some were selling tissues on the square. On part of the video, some of the children were shy of the camera and they attempted to hide behind cars. After the film had been finished, a few years later it was surprising to us that this child came to us accompanied by one of my relatives who found him asleep in the streets near to his shop. As he entered the house and found the other children, he was



shocked that they all seemed to know him, as he could not remember the day of filming. What is important is that he entered our home but he was calm and kept to himself, to the extent that we sometimes did not even hear him. Generally speaking, we leave new children entering the home to get used to the new environment by themselves with time until they feel happy and secure. After some time, this happened with Hussain and we found him interacting with the other children although he did not completely settle within our home, nor did he interact with all children. I was keen to understand the reason behind his behavior. For this reason, I sat with him discussing lots of things concerning him and his previous life on the street. He began explaining his story to me, stating that his parents died in an explosion in Sadr City, the explosion hit the Hay Market. He lived most of his life with his aunt who used to send him to work frequently and demand money of him. If Hussain did not bring the amount of money his aunt dictated, he was punished by being hit or burnt with a hot knife by his aunt. Occasionally he was forced into begging on the street to achieve the amount of money his aunt demanded. For this reason, Hussain ran away from home as he did not have the money demanded and was physically abused by his aunt and was eventually forced to live on the street. For a number of months he was unable to sleep at night as he was frightened, especially during the cold winter months. He would wake up early in the morning to work and would return to one of the street islands at 11am to try sleep when it was a little warm. This continued for nearly 3 years. For a few months, Hussain was able to stay with at the home of one of the homeless children who was younger than Hussain that he was previously with in Beirut Square. The friend stayed in his home with 2 brothers and his mother. Hussain would give them a cut of his earnings from selling chewing gum and tissues on the street. After a while, Hussain was no longer comfortable staying with



them for that reason he decided to leave them and live on the streets. Those days were difficult for him as he felt alone and did not have anyone to support or defend him when he needed. The days passed and everyday he went through pain because of his situation up until he arrived close the barbers, my nephew, who took Hussain to his home and brought him to the orphanage. Now our work has started with this autistic child who isolated himself and he did not participate with any activities with the others. We normally avoid forcing children into activities and leave the choice up to them. The options for activities included; hairdressing, sewing, computing, music, drawing and cooking. I would monitor Hussain as he would enter activities hoping we would find him in the correct place. As I was watching him, I would see that he did not like of the activities. On one of the days, I entered him into the arts room and stayed with him. I gave out plasticine (fake clay) to the children, of whom Hussain was one, and I monitored Hussain and found that he loved playing and passionately made sculptures as I gave him my support and watched what he made. After he finished, I applauded and encouraged him. On that day we stayed together working in the art room until late at night and was extremely happy as I felt that we had cross the first barrier in the care of Hussain. The barrier being his participation in activities and found something he is passionate about. Afterwards, to improve his self-confidence I began giving him the keys to the art room and made him in charge of the room and its responsibilities. Because of this he began improving until I was astonished by his improvement as well as everyone else until they began talking about his great artwork. After a while, I organized an exhibition for his artwork which was attended by many people, all of whom loved his work, including his teacher. Even the media were fascinated by his work and his work was broadcast on various satellite channels. The channels titled his work as, "The Child that Sold Tissues and converted to the



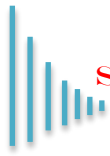
artist.” Afterwards, we entered him into school as he was illiterate. He is now able to read and write. Furthermore, on his own, he began to learn the English language by learning the important English words. During this time, he was invited to an exhibition in USA, however he was unable to attend as he did not have any of the important travel documents. For that reason, we were only able to send his artwork only, of which, luckily, one of his works was awarded the prize of the best artwork in the under 15s out of 250 other American artists. After this work, we tried to get Hussain all of his documents, a process which a year. The impact the art had on his life converted him from a homeless, lonely child that did not enjoy anything in life, nor did he know the meaning of life that was forced to sleep on the street and sell tissues to a great and famous child artist, both famous in Iraq and worldwide. Therefore our psychological program showed it was successful through this child by the childhood psychiatry programs through encouraging hobbies. On one occasion as I was entering the orphanage, I was shocked to by the news that Hussain had run away from our House for unknown reasons. Nobody knew the reason for his escape, neither the workers or the children as he had been normal. I had left him last afternoon after having agreed with him to finish one of his pieces of art for his next exhibition for which he was extremely happy about. In reality, all my dreams were over and all my ambitions collapsed by the escape of Hussain. I felt great sadness as everything was lost as I felt it was failure after everything I had done for the child, he preferred the streets over his presence in the orphanage. This meant that there is some defect in the house that needs more work to maintain care of the children which resulted in Hussain leaving for the streets. What is important was I was stuck between 2 emotions, sad over Hussain leaving and the need to be strong and avoid the problems as the children look towards me as their role model in all things. It is vital that I stayed strong and not give up as



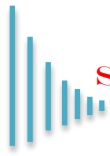
they were all waiting for my reaction to Hussain leaving. The loss which I felt between me and him meant that I needed to solve the problem very calmly, as his escape should serve as a lesson for others or at least it was important for me to convert it to a lesson for the others. I brought the children together and explained to them that some of them do not know what is best for them and where their interests lie, nor do they know where they find themselves and I do not blame Hussain for leaving as he is so young and does not know about. What Hussain did was a loss for us, however, the greater loss was on Hussain as he had lost his friends and brothers, lost his warm family located in the orphanage and he lost his safety and security which we provided for him in the orphanage, acting as the best opportunity for him to become the most famous artist in the world. In the end, he chose his route and we have to respect his decisions. I have not gone after him nor have I searched for him and have left him to himself and he's the one to decide. His options are to either stay on the street or return to the House which the children continue to ask about and are shocked because it is the first time I have left a child, and which child was it? Hussain the International Artist that the world was excited over. I felt ripped apart and sighed inside myself over Hussain, however, it was important for me to be more careful to look after the rest of the children and to make the story of Hussain a story for the others. Mindful of this, I used to leave the house without anyone knowing so that I could look for Hussain and to confirm his location, something that continued for 3 days. On the third day, one of our searchers contacted me explaining that she had incidentally spotted Hussain at Beirut Square, close to our orphanage. She had spoken with Hussain until he ran away from her. This news made me extremely happy as it meant Hussain needed to stay close to our home and meant that Hussain wanted to monitor the orphanage. Everyone asked of me to go to Hussain and bring him back, however I strongly rejected



the requested and told the searchers to ignore Hussain should they see him as I wanted him to return to the orphanage of his own will, so that he will know the importance and significance of the orphanage. This was the most difficult decision I have made in the rights of a child but eventually I was able to show the others I was correct in my decision. Hussain would daily come closer to the orphanage day by day and he began to try send others to come talk with us so that he can return to the House. The escape of Hussain even affected my relationship with others as I was constantly sad over him. The important thing is that Hussain returned and I left him and did not speak to him nor did question him about the reasons of his leaving. I wanted him to be the one to explain the reasons. Hussain came and asked to come talk with me, our conversation was the big change in my relationship with Hussain as the reason for his escape changed by sadness into happiness and victory. He escaped from the orphanage after hearing there was an explosion in the same area he used to previously stay with his friends and his fear over their wellbeing was what made him escape the House through his selflessness to reassure himself over the wellbeing of his friends. This reason made me extremely happy, however, I had to tell him that his way of leaving was incorrect and that he should have asked me or the others to take him to the place to reassure him. What Hussain did was evidence of the success we had in creating a new character for Hussain who had feelings for others and the rush to help others, characteristics which Hussain did not previously have. After this, Hussein carried on with his work and improved his artistic talents a lot especially after I got him a teacher who taught him drawing as well as to play the violin so he can perfect his talent, and to learn new techniques. They had a great relationship, which made it easier for his readiness to improve his art and music. In this time we co-ordinated many exhibitions for him that were successful. He became one of Iraqs famous children



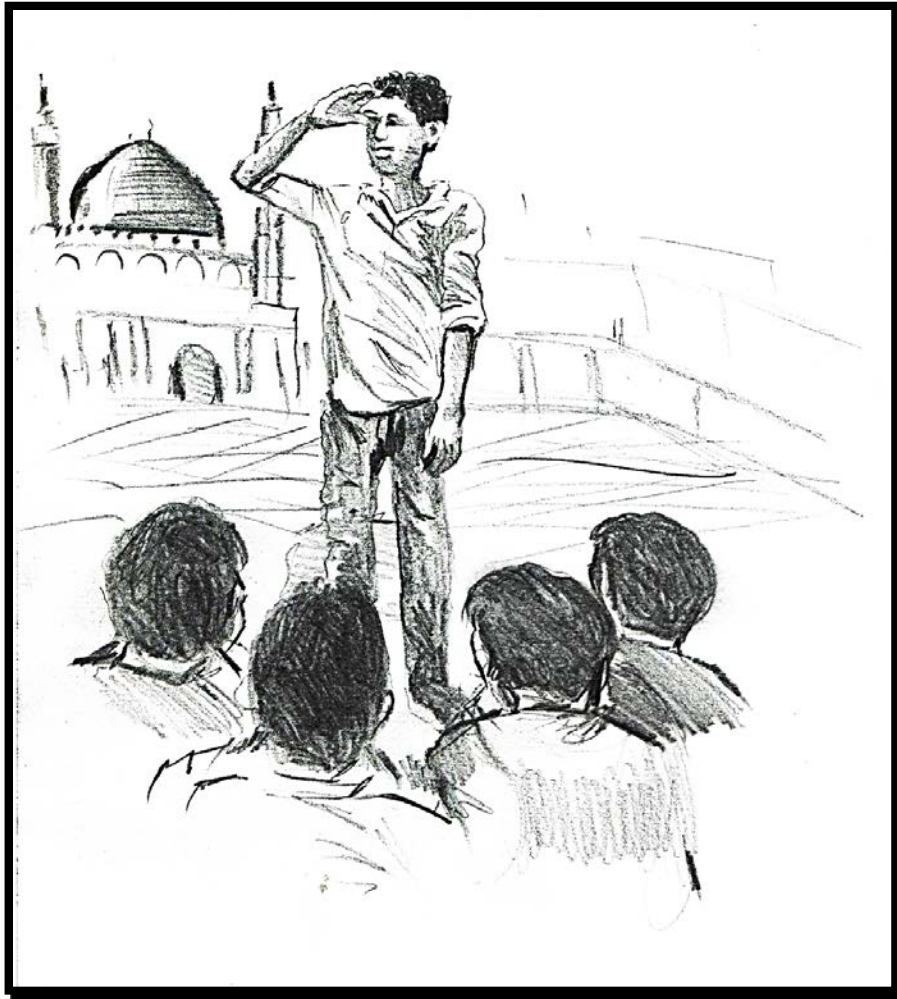
if not the most famous, and people began to come to our safe house, to buy his work and to meet with him, also to visit his studio, due to their curiosity, and to know how this child was able to excel in his life, who was the talk of the town. But unfortunately his ego started to creep in, and he began to be very moody and not disciplined, where he did not create new work for long periods of time. But in a moment you find he creates a painting that is full of beauty and brilliance, for this reason we did not put any pressure on him, and we dealt with the situation very calmly. We were considerate to his situation and his age when he was a teenager, but his situation started to become unbearable and the others started copying him and demand the same privileges that were given to him. One of the privileges is a mobile phone, which is completely denied in our house due to Internet issues and Facebook, especially that we are a company and we have our policies and rules that should be implemented and respected. After this, his mobile phone usage was used in negative way, where he stayed up late at night for hours looking at Facebook, and interact with girls, after sending them friend requests, but not knowing who they are, only by liking they way they look on their profile pictures. And during the day he stayed asleep. This is against our rules that all our children abide by. When we address this or ask him to wake up early in the morning, he created problems with the researcher, and when we confiscated the mobile from him, he ran away. This occurred twice, this is why we made the decision to send him to his Aunts, who lives in Erbil, although we know that she did not really take care of him. We know this because she has left him 7 years, 4 of which he spent in the streets and the 3 years he spent at our safe house. We were concerned about the rest of the children, so they do not take in the same footsteps as him. We know that we took care of our duties completely when it came to him as we took him from the street and it's dangers and put him in school, where he learned to read and write, and we



developed his talents, appointed a teacher to teach him arts and music. And we were able to get all his belongings drawings as mentioned before. On the day that his Aunt visited us and we conversed with her, we found that she did not care about all what I have done for Hussein, but she spoke about his psychological situation and that he was never settled, and that he needs special care as if she has been caring for him for years. This infuriated me and infuriated the rest of the researches, and we said to her, if you know of all these things, the best thing to do is that you take all his belongings and not to ask us to do anything that we have already done for Hussein, who has changed and was the most famous child in Iraq and one of the most famous child in the world. It would have been appreciate if you thanked us for what we did for him. But she talked in a bad way and denied all efforts made for Hussein by us. So we decided to give him back to her and get a written guarantee that she will not let him be on the street and that she takes care of him. This way we would have done what we could and closed the case.



Story of S.A



In the time that Baghdad the Capital of Iraq, was crying out for help form what has happened because of the invasion of the American military in 2003, and turning it into a city of ghosts, empty from people, who used fill the streets, and fill the towns. All of the civilian appearances has disappeared and replaced with the armed military appearance. The tanks filled the streets in all shapes and sizes, that was not a familiar site to the people of Iraq, even after all of the wars that they have been through. The tanks destroyed the pavements and blocked the road and destroyed them, and arrange them depending on their political affiliation, their Religious believes and principles. Baghdad is divided into two half by the river Dajla.



ALKarakh and ALRASAFEEa.The east side is ALRASAFEE and the West side is ALKarakh, where bridged on River Dajla connects them. The us military announced its control of the bridges that connects the two and they began to control the people who wanted to cross. Some children were happy with this, because it gave them the freedom of movement, as there were seldom any cars in the street, because people were scared they will get robbed, the rise of the petrol prices and the fact that people were scared of the US military fire as, there were many civilian victims.The happiness of the children was, that they were able to play football, which is their favourite game, any where without and obstacles or red lines.There were a lot of these children who were homeless, released by us army from the juvenile custody after they invaded Baghdad. Most of these children were addicted to sniffing, glue and taking pills.Within all of this and all that I have seen and been through, there was someone who befriended me, who was my small friend who was 13 years old while I roamed in places in Baghdad, weather on foot or in a vehicle.Getting to a certain place looking for children in the street who wanted to join our project for accommodation “ The safe house for the homeless”. My new friend, who joined the teams for the outreach, has now gained experience with dealing with the homeless children and he has knowledge of the entire region and where to find these children. Through out this I remembered his story and how he joined our project, and I have the memories that I will present to you.He was 13 when he came to us in the side, brown skin and very witty, he laughs a lot and is mischievous and tells jokes here and there, also he has a lot of qualities that gave him a place between everyone in the house from the beginning as he has leadership qualities, where he lead a lot of the children in the streets and use them to guide them, and some of these children re now in the same house.S. he is the older brother of two girls, he used to live with his parents in the city called



Kathimea, he used to collect empty drink cans, and also used to lead a group of homeless kids that used to do everything he asked without doubt, including begging and stealing. He led the group with an adult mentality and great planning. He used to put them in groups, and give every child his role when on a stealing mission, or confront other groups who did the same thing. The stealing missions used to take place inside an area where the tomb of the imam Mousa Alkathem resided.

S used to go to a high point and give out signs and signals that were used to indicate of something that is worth stealing, for example mobiles, bags, wallets etc. And to every item have a signal and a code that was used with the direction of S., who came up with this that was secret to them only. I will mention two code words "shah" means "beware there is police" and "Alij" means a "money wallet".

Of course these codes were never told to anyone apart from very close people who were trusted. This is what happened with me after a while of being around him and made him trust me and open up to me about everything in his life and what he used to do.

On one of the days where we were conversing at a sit down in the evening, amongst a number of other children who used to be present at most of our sit downs, because of the similar social issues that they suffer from, and that they used to go on these adventures together in the streets. S told us that one day when he was on the streets, he was on a stealing mission he noticed that someone had a sum of money that was in the inside pocket of his jacket, and he felt that from bumping into him that the sum of money was a big amount. S. Spoke freely and to quote "I started salivating as if I was hungry and saw a barbecued chicken" so "I tried a couple of times to reach for it, but I discovered that this person put a pin in his pocket because they used to get warned of people who steal in this area, this is where my attempts failed. This amount was very attractive to me and I could not leave it,



so I decided that I will steel this money no matter what, even if I get caught. So I kept trying and my attempts worked and I succeeded in getting the pin out, and I threw it away and I stayed behind this person. And just before I gave up I was able to steel the money and disappear between the traffic of people. After I was far away from the place by a few Kilometres I went to an empty place, and took the money out of my clothing, which was wrapped in a plastic bag. I opened it and the amount was 1000000, Iraqi Diars, and some Iranian cheques. The cheques were issued from the central bank of Iraq, to the visitors in order to make things easier to carry and exchange. There were also some \$100 notes. All in all, the value came up to 5000,000 Iraqi dinars”.

This is where I stopped him in his tracks and back asked him how he exchanged the cheques for money and how long the money lasted him. S. replied with a smile. “I did everything I could. I ate everything I wanted and I played I spend money on the poor, I used buy Nestle from the homeless children for 100000 Iraqi dinars or a \$100. I used to invite my homeless friends to the restaurant and pay for everyone, as well as going to brothels and sleep with women who were older than me. I used to humiliate them and enjoy it with my money. I wanted to take my revenge”. In my opinion S. took revenge because of the bad way he used to get treated by his Aunt, and her taking advantage of him and make him beg for money.

I will speak of her story with S. at some point. S. Spent the money within a week to 10 days. And because of this story he was more popular and people liked him, because he spend money on them and fed them so they were always around him. He also mentioned a funny story to me where he says, when he had the big amount of money, and was spending without care, he had an idea, to invite the homeless, and beggars to a meal and decided that there should be 10 of them. Which he did and headed to the restaurant. When we were entering one of the workers in the restaurant shouted and asked where they

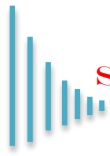


were going and asked them to leave, so the children got scared and were hesitant to go in. This is where he shouted back at the worker with the same manner “what’s wrong with you, with our money we can go into where ever we like, and if you don’t like this there are thousands of other restaurants” and he took a large amount of money from his pocket, where the worker changed his attitude and tone of voice, and welcomed them and directed them to the table to sit down and did a few adjustments because of the number of children, and fixed a few tables together to fit them all. The children were very happy but awkward at the same time, because of the situation they are in, as this has never happened to them before, as they are used to eating and drinking on the streets and not anywhere clean, where people respected them and did things for them. So S. money made them be respected, but they looked very strange and they were the centre of attention of all the people who were in the restaurant, because of their dirty clothes and their messy hair. This is where the waiter came and asked them for their order and what they wanted to eat. They were shy and hesitant, so he told them, do not be shy, you are sitting here with your money, you get anything you want. Each child ordered what they have been wanting for a long time, and waited for their food. They were laughing and talking about things they have been through and situations that have happened when they were in the streets. After around half an hour, the food came with appetisers and everyone pounced on it, as if they were taking their revenge and making up for the days where they hadn’t had anything. When everyone was finished and filled their stomach, they got up, and one of the children went to wash his hands, where one of the waiters said to him “no need to wash, just wipe your hands on your clothes”, so S told him, “take off your shirt and let him wipe his hands. With our money, we eat and wash and pay so let us be”. This is where the owner got involved and told the worker to leave them to wash, so S



told him “no, need we will wipe our hands with tissues “, so he took a whole box of tissues and everyone wiped their hands and mouths.

This made everyone look. After this he remembered, before paying the bill that they did not drink tea. So he told the children “lets drink tea, sit down”. Everyone laughed including the people sitting in the restaurant. The restaurant owner stood up in anger and said “Get out of here, this is best for you, I respected you enough”. So S. thought, to leave is better than to get hit in front of everyone, especially after what they did with the workers. So he paid the bill and left laughing and it was the best day of his life. And once while he was at home being the last time he visits the house, his aunt called him while >>> laundry in the terrace. As he went upstairs to see her, she tried to seduce him but he strongly refused and left home. He said to her before leaving: ‘ Is this for the money, take it’. He threw the money in her face and left home. It is now that S.A. becomes >>>> on all people in the society including men, women and children. This grudge has been translated to >>>> actions against all kind of people. He used to steal from men and women, and when he has good amount of money, he would have sex with elderly women and enjoys humiliating them by giving them lots of money. When he did not have the money, he would have sex with children especially with those who are younger and more beautiful than him as he suffered another psychological complex of having dark skin. Because of this dark skin, he used to take revenge or try to take revenge from any child prettier than him. This revenge was either by physical means or sexual in addition to the bad language he would use against them. This way he would free himself from family problems in a way and another he would release his psychological complex through his improper actions. I met S.A. in Al-Kaddiymmia while I was searching street children in there. I knew straightaway that he leader as he was highly confident and how surrounding people are



listening to him. It was quite good for me that I met him at a time when he had many problems and one of those problem was that he had a problem with two >>>> with those elder than him. As they rule that area, the problem was that he did not listen to their laws but instead he worked for his own benefit in their area. These gangs used to divide areas among them. In addition, police was after him for robbery. These problems pushed him to find a new shelter even for a temporary time. This what >>>>children would do from time to time to avoid problems. I greeted him. I felt he knew about me some information so he was calm. He received me with a wide smile, however this mostly is not the norm as of the mistrust issues that developed in the society and with others. Besides, these people are conservative when dealing with others (the outside world). We talked a number of things like where he lives, whether his parents are alive or not and how old he is. I raised these questions so he opens up with me and feels comfortable, also, to have an opportunity to ask him to come with me to the shelter home. I have then noticed that he kind of agreed on coming with me. And this is because of the aforementioned problems he was going through and off course he was conservative about some things as it looked like he is going to what it looks like a prison to him and everything will be done orderly and with discipline. There will have to be a permission for ins and outs, sleeping and waking up times, playing and studying times and other things that will be prohibited to him compared to the past when those things were allowed. On top of all this, he will be losing the power and leadership he was having before and this time he will have to be an ordinary person and equal to those who used to control and order. In the end, he went with me although he felt threatened but he thought it is for a short time until his circumstances improve and people forget about his doings. On the way, he did not stop asking questions. He wanted to know everything about the building we were



going to including the size of the building, where he will be sleeping, how many children were in this project, the way we treat them, whether we will beat them or not and what we will do if the children disobey the rules or children fight among each other. He also asked whether they can go out, can have picnics and whether they will get pocket money. All these questions were in his head searching for quick answers to calm him down and assure him before arriving the house. We entered the house and he acted like everyone new to the house as if he is strong, powerful and careless about others. He started fighting children and bullying harassing them. He was careful though with some children who were same age as his or older, and this is because of his past experience in the street. He could determine what kind of people he should avoid and not fight with them at least in the present time. He also recognised some of the children that he knew before when he was in the street and he kind of felt relaxed that they will talk to others about him and his >>>>>After his entry to this house, it was my responsibility to prepare a present and future plan for this child. I have actually started having individual therapies where he earned my trust and he started being comfortable with me a lot. I began to show him, honestly, plenty of love, tenderness, appreciation and a special place compared to his mates. I did all of this to ensure him that he should not feel that he lost everything and this is particularly true at the beginning of his entry to the project. For this, first thing I did was changing his surname to a famous French player surname as he looked like him in appearance and playtime. I also used group therapy techniques where I gathered the children having the same problems in sittings so they talk about their problems and life stories and then I put happy endings to these stories after performing them in a play having the children to be the heroes. This has succeeded with S.A. and I noticed change towards betterment in his manners, morals and his dealings with others. He started looking at



himself with pride unlike how it was before where looked at himself inferiorly for what he was doing in the street. Now his confidence got lifted and this is what we were aiming at, or particular, I was aiming at. His trust in me has increased as well, I used to video all therapies with him. He had opened up with me telling me all that what was going on in his life and this was what other same-age and older children and teens used to do.

After that, I requested from the project boss to be the responsible person for the children and teens who have similar personality traits and have suffered the same social and psychological problems. Besides, I requested to transfer them to another house in Al-Wazzyiriah as for that time the house was in Al-Sayyadiyah. I got approved for the request. Firstly I did was making them work to learn a skill or >>>>where they can earn money and taste the >>> way of living and to show them that they should work hard to earn and the feel the value of the work they do. Also, I wanted them to feel they are important people in the society and that they are not any less than other people in position and significance. Another reason for me to make work was they are old and as they did not go to school before and they did not seem to have interest in studying and education, therefore I thought of teaching them a skill to benefit from in future and help them to establish families. S.A. was working as a mechanical >>> for repairing cars with one of my friends. He quickly developed a good reputation and people were talking about him and he became a role model of good manners, less talking and more working, to his colleagues and other shops' people unlike other workers. He was very active and creative in his performance at work. It looked like he knew his work for long, and this is a reflection of his enjoyment the new work. I used to supervise those children and teens at work from early morning until the afternoon when work is finished. Then I used to gather them to the house or I bring them to my own house during working hours and they were used to it.



Sometimes they from me to ask my wife to cook for them a special dish like Dolma, which I personally like as it gathers all family members around one table. In this way, they felt a family atmosphere and warmth and I sent assurance and peace messages to their inner core through our gatherings around food table that was missing for many years. In this time, I was exposed to many >>>> for bringing car repair shops teens who are having black clothes due to the grease from car engines, this was a sign for their work in car mechanics, and I was doing it on purpose. Once they were done with work and they got home, I used to prepare bathroom for them to have shower. Then they would change their cloths and we go out and people would see them in their normal appearance. The most annoying thing to some people was my love to children and my care for them and our strong relationship. I think this grudge and annoyance was because of the common culture we had in society that doesn't accept street children and doesn't accept their entry to houses or meeting them by the family members, also this grudge might be because of envy and jealousy.

More importantly, S. was a unique case as he is gone through very >>>> circumstances in his childhood. Even with that, you see him always smiling and joy is part of his daily behaviour most of the time. This is kind of strange as we know in psychology, particularly specialists, that experiences in childhood reflect on the personality of the individual when he/she grows up and these experiences contribute to the formation of the individual personality on a bigger scale and it might have psychological complexes in them if they are bad and perhaps result in >>>> isolation and depression of the individual. This was not the case for S., I saw him as a social child and never isolated. He used to like social activities and contributes to supporting others and helping them. He also liked change as he was unsatisfied about himself in the past. Therefore, when opportunity had arrived, he grabbed it firmly and worked to improve

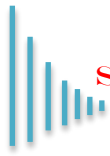


himself. This we saw in his way of working to earn >>>>. Although his hard work was not proportional to the amount of money he earned at the end of the week, but he insisted to continue working. Perhaps he was the only one among his colleagues who did not get absent from work because to laziness, boredom or tiredness but only rarely and it was maybe because of his illness.

S. has made sure not to spend what he earned carelessly, instead he started thinking of his future and how to arrange his life and gather his family members which is formed of two sisters being in orphan house which belongs to the >>>> and an auntie whom he shares love with. For this, he used to work very hard and used to save nearly all the money he earned, but at the same time he was generous with his mates in the house, especially after his weekly income became very good in comparison to his mates' income. He was also improved and developed a good experience in his work. All used to like him because of his joy and humour. After some period of time, we started working on joining him with his auntie who was living in Al-Sha'ab city, which was quite far from Al-Kadhimyah. And this is the nature of my work in all cases with street children; I search a place for the child far from where he does his improper behaviours. The reason for this is to distance him from the environment, mates and society that do not accept the idea of fixing the individual. This problem in our society is not only limited to children, but also in all levels and >>>>. The problem here is that we do not accept the idea of repentance for an individual and do not help those who want it but instead we fight them to regret the fact that they thought of repentance. We visited his Auntie and invited her to visit the house a number of times. Then, in the following weeks, we sent him to her Thursday and Friday and we continued this for two months. After the two months, we joined him with her but this after we made sure that she will keep him safe. We also continued watching him for six months and this was until his settlement eventually as



he rented a house for him and >>> his two sisters and auntie to live with him. Now he is settled and married and became a different person way far from how he was burden in the society and insignificant, inferior- feeling child who hates himself and the society and doing all the improper behaviours without moral, religious or humane >>>>>



Commentary

After reading previous stories you will find that there are several things that can be summed up as follows: - Most of the children, especially the homeless, including victims whom are be taken away with others who cause that and deprived of their most basic rights, which was supposed to enjoy it and most importantly the warmth of family and good education, and other services that would create a good generation be the pillars of the future and serve the country, alas, I say that these children are victims of the society did not have mercy on them and did not stand next to them and did not bother to looking into the causes of displacement and only monitoring and neglect, but it contributed in one way or another that worsen their condition because it did not think of solutions to their problem and let them face their fate alone. I have intentionally chose the most difficult situations for the children of the homeless do not have the simplest real necessities of life, which could produce us healthy children do not suffer from the contract and psychological problems and also deliberately chose this group because it is the most difficult in terms of integration with the community and the most dangerous to the community and succeeded in reform knowing there are much easier cases and some within the families live, but they did not find it extends them a helping hand and tries to address the problems so aggravated and turned into a psychological contract and turning innocent child to someone oblique and aggressive and violent and enclosed himself the same cannot integrate with members of the community, and this is what I want to concentrate it through my storytelling previous stories, I am trying to re-embrace this child or solo for the bosom of society through hard work and real work and through rehabilitation programs proved successful since we have succeeded with the most dangerous and the most difficult segment it is possible to succeed with the rest of the class



being suffer from the simplest conditions than has happened in the first tranche. If we reviewed the children who have been stories listed, we find there are several reasons led to the displacement of which the economic situation that makes poor families abandon her children and leave them on the street and the other reason is the disintegration of family and we mean a divorce, because in case of divorce, a child with either the father and his second wife or with the mother and her second husband, both of whom did not want the child, so to find that the street is good incubator him and also get us another reason marriages outside the framework of the Court (underage marriage / common-law marriages) or illegal marriages result in children not attribute to parents of specific, and then we see that domestic violence practiced against the child also could lead to the exit to the street to escape the influence of their parents and their cruelty it, do not forget to give the relatives of the child and non-interference in solving his problem with his family also contributes to homelessness and distaste for his family. We knew the reasons and will now ask the outcome of the situation of children in the street, as he was due to his presence for long periods in the street exposed to many other things, repeated his peers physical attacks in the street, or bystanders may develop up to the nationality sometimes attacks up to be a day, To escape this fact, and so the baby bear these attacks forms of child starts becoming addicted to sniffing solvents and adhesives, a condition that exercised even adults when they face difficult circumstances find them to drink alcohol and some of them smoked cigarettes, and then the child's aggressive and violent it becomes to defend the same is also trying to assault physically and sexually on other children younger not to compensate for what he suffered at the beginning of his stay in the street. After that comes our universe and lasting come at times and missed interfere This is the case of our communities that do not address the problems at the beginning and find solutions



to them but are interfering after he sees the danger began approaching them has hurt her or her reputation, and do not forget we are newcomers to these problems being we have not seen significantly until after 2003 and also the domain is not available to us to work with this segment during the former regime, was an opportunity for me through the children of Kurdistan Protection Organization, which has opened an individual in Baghdad and worked to accommodate these children in the house has been allocated to them, and they results are very good as we mentioned in the stories that we have addressed. Now it's the role of society and the reader who was briefed on the book, and here it to reach the conviction that reform is possible and that any child is easy to make it together children from plans not previously counted include family and children with us and should also shared every effort to governmental and civil society organizations from in order to address this social problem and reduce the phenomenon of homeless children



Part Two

Short Stories



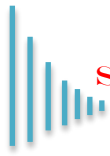
- **Location: Intersection of Al-Waziriya near the Academy of Fine Arts**

Time: Ten o'clock in the morning of the year 2005

(N) is a 13 years-old girl or possibly younger who has been living on the streets as a homeless for several years. I met her one morning on my way to the "Safe House for the homeless," project which is located in the Al-Waziriya district near the Academy of Fine Arts, I greeted her and she responded in a cold and sad tone which indicated her anger, so I asked her "What's wrong?" and she replied in colloquial dialect/language "what do you want me to tell you Sir, I did not sleep the whole night because of boys who await their turn to have sex with me one after another,"

It remains for me to inform you some of N's details; she had two miscarriages living on the streets and she is currently 13 years of age or less so I leave you to imagine the size of this tragedy that children of both gender, male and female are living on the street.

End of story

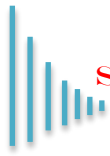


- **Location: near a petrol station in Sadr City**

Time/Period: 2007

The child's parents are divorced, the father remarried a woman who has her own children, whom he educates and ensures they receive all of life's comforts and showers them with kindness and care. The child's mother has also remarried a man much older than her, who suffers from poor eyesight and together they have four daughters. The mother looks after her husband and ensures the comfort and happiness of him and the girls. The child lives in his maternal grandparents' house where his uncles make an art of torturing him to the extent that one the day they broke his foot to stop him from leaving their house, because quite often the child smuggles himself out of the house to go and see his parents but every time he gets thrown out and soon enough the uncles are informed of his action and he receives a dire punishment. Until one day where the uncles had enough and reached the end of their tethers with him so they left him to live on the streets. The child decided to live on a street that was halfway between his father and mother's houses, he had a broken foot with plaster on it, and one day I spotted him and brought him to the Safe House where he was treated for his broken foot and we took the plaster off him, then tried to contact his father and after a huge hassle we reached him and as soon as we mentioned the child (S) the father lost his temper and addressed us in a quite aggressive tone saying, and I quote: "I don't have any child named (S) and if you ever bring him here I will shoot him and throw him in the litter bins,". Afterwards we visited the mother who as soon as she heard us talk about the child (S) said: "my husband does not want him in our home and if you bring him here he will divorce me and I have four daughters". And so we returned back to the Safe House along with the Child (S) ...

End of Story



● **Location: Palestine Street**

Time/Period : 2011

One evening I received a call from the researcher Samir Jassim telling me that there are two children displaced from the Diyala province and that their mother is dead and the father has some kind of mental health condition, after spending many years as a prisoner of war in Iran. The children are now living with their paternal uncle and his wife, who are seeking for the children to be placed in the Safe House for a certain period until they can sort out their own situation. Of course, I agreed instantly and told him to come to us tomorrow morning and sure thing the father came with the sons; the eldest was nine years old and the younger one was six years of age though he appears more like a four year old due to his small stature and very childish features. It was visibly clear that the father was suffering a psychic/ emotional disorder from the way he talked and manner in which he utters letters and his inability to speak his words in order, plus his general exterior appearance was enough of a sign. We agreed for him leave the children at our project while he arranges his affairs and then take them but we also agreed on a weekly visit and if he is able to take them Thursday and Friday then return them Saturday. He signed a receipt that acknowledges it was he who brought the children to the Safe House and clears the project of any responsibility to whatever accident the children may suffer.

The father left and the children stayed with us, then few days later a woman claiming to be the paternal uncle's wife came to the project along with a person whom I did not recognise but introduced himself as a relative and began telling me how the father is a waster and crazy with metal health problem and that he has two other daughters apart from the sons and that they are currently living at their uncle's house.



Here lies the big problem and the most difficult, in term of acceptance by the community on the one hand and in finding a solution; the two things are linked, because for certain not accepting the problem, or even recognising its existence prevents finding any solution to it. The problem very briefly is that the children admitted to the uncle's wife that their father has been sexually abusing his underage daughters; the eldest is a 12-year-old and the youngest 10 years of age. The eldest son fearing for his sisters sought the help of his uncle's wife in an attempt to save them from this criminal who does not have any mercy or humanity. I stood helpless in front of this problem and for the first time ever I felt utterly useless and incapable of taking any action, I did not know what to do with me not being an official government entity; I do not have the authority which would enable me to make this person accountable, plus now that both the uncle and his wife are aware of the problem maybe they will take action.

At night I received a call from the researcher who told me that the father of the children has arrived to take them and subconsciously without any thought I said "let him take them" as though I wanted to escape from the responsibility, or you wanted to end this nightmare that has made me talk to myself night and day ...

Without prolonging the story, it actually ends here.



● **Location: Baghdad**

Time/Period: Three thirty in the afternoon in 2016

My personal mobile rang and as I answered this conversation took place:

- **Hello, Peace be upon you professor/MR Hisham**
- **And Peace be upon you brother**
- **I am Sorry to disturb you at such an inconvenient time but it is an important matter**
- **No problem brother, go ahead**
- **Professor/Mr Hisham there is a woman trying to sell her two-year-old son, but we caught her just in time and stopped her**
- **Who are you brother ?**
- **I am so and so from the Sadr City's community and have heard of you and the work that you do and I took your number from a friend**
- **Pleased to meet you brother, where she is now?**
- **I will bring her to the Safe House, God willing,**
- **OK, why does she want to sell the child?**
- **She says that her paternal uncles will not allow the child to remain with her after she split from the father.**
- **Where is their home?**
- **Their home is in the fourth police district and her uncles live in the city of Najaf**
- **Where is her husband**



- The husband left her and went to Kirkuk, he is Kurdish and their marriage is just a paper that is written between them and not legal as it is not registered in the relevant department.
- Dear brother, I am not going to be at the Safe House today but you can send her to the duty officer/councillor there
- God willing, but can you just inform them before we go please
- No problem I will contact the on duty councillor now

I contacted the on duty officer and asked him to take child and to take images of then then get them to sign a receipt that acknowledges the child's hand over. Plus to take their address and mobile numbers and to be certain of their story.

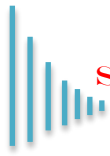
The big surprise occurred when they arrived at the Safe House as one of the children who lives in the Safe House recognised the woman. The child is seven year old and was also left at the Safe House by the woman after her second marriage, also not legally recognised one .>>>>>
End of Story



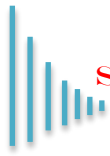
- **Location: Baghdad**
Year: 2015

I received a phone call from one of the politicians, who introduced himself and explained to me the situation of a displaced person from Sinjar, a Yazidi youth accompanied by a child who is approximately 6 years of age. Both man and child used to sleep in liberation square before they were taken to stay in one of the protected caravans owned by the politician. Due to the circumstances of the father and his child the politician requested that I take them into the safe house, I agreed and so they were sent to me. Once they had entered the house the father was asked about their situation and it became clear to us that his wife had been kidnapped by an ISIS gang during their journey of displacement and that the father was to that moment still unknowing of his wife's fate. The operation had taken place in front of the child whose silence was broken only on the few occasions that he spoke to his dad in the Yazidi language. The boy never left his father's side and was stuck to him most of the time, as soon the child was asked any question the father responded instantly saying that the child spoke very little Arabic and that he was still suffering from shock and fear of strangers because of the incident that happened in front of him. This exchange occurred on several occasions when I tried to speak to the boy. When I asked the man about the reason for his stay in liberation square, he told me he was at a sit-in there and that he had been presenting his story to the media and the world. Having been an English teacher the man was fluent in English as he was also fluent in Arabic, a lot of the time I'd hear him speaking on his phone in English and when I ask him about it he'd reply saying that he is a correspondent for a news channel.

Going back to the child, after he settled in the "safe house" for a few days I suggested to his father that he



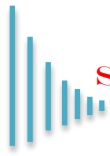
stays to teach the kids in the house English for a monthly salary. I said that I'd treat him on the basis that he is an employee on the condition that he gives the child some space and allows him to mingle and socialise with the other children. Seeing as his choices were limited the father agreed to take me up on my offer. Within a few days the child had integrated with the rest of the children in the house and had started to enunciate a few Arabic words and phrases. The boy knew the names of the other children in the house of by heart and he gradually began to distance himself from his father to the point where he wouldn't respond if he called him while he was playing. In my experience with these matters, it seemed to me like the father was starting to feel uneasy about his son's distancing himself from him and his integration with his peers. I also felt like the father had been using his child when presenting his story in order to gain sympathy from others, which in turn would enable him to earn money under the pretense that the child was suffering from post-traumatic stress after his mother had been kidnapped. Furthermore I found out that the father had been calling foreign news channels in hope of selling his story and making money or the chance to seek refuge outside Iraq. Once the child had blended in and managed to overcome his psychological difficulties that the father had nurtured and encouraged, his father began to feel threatened and so he decided to take the child and leave the "safe house". When I asked the man where he would go, he responded saying "back to Sinjar", I asked him how he would be able to get back when all the roads were cut-off and the city was under the control of ISIS and he said he had been contacted by friends there who had told him that there was a safe passage through which he could re-enter the city. I was baffled by his story however seeing as I had no authority over him, I had no other choice but to let him go.>>>>> End of story.



● **Location: Al-Saydeya District**
Year 2005

The door of the safe house project was being knocked, the security guard opened the door to find a women in her thirties accompanied by a teenager aged around thirteen or fourteen years old. She asked for the manager of the place and was taken to the reception where she met the project manager. The women requested that he allow her child to stay in the home since he's an orphan and she had re-married a man who was harsh with him, which lead to him running away from home and on to the street on several occasions. She said she feared for him and so she brought him to the home in hope that he would be welcomed and that he would be safe and secure. The project manager agreed to take the boy (A) in. The boy was good looking and showed no signs of homelessness with his fair, smooth skin and delicate composure. His physical features did not match those of a street child, nevertheless he was welcomed and integrated with the rest of the children in the home.

After a while, as per usual, I held a meeting with him late at night, which is something I usually do during my security rounds in the safe house. I started speaking to him and asking him questions about his private life, specifically about the kind of treatment he received at the hands of his step-father and his mother's attitude towards how he was treated. After I managed to corner him with my questions, he broke down crying and began to narrate in his fury, pain and sadness all that had happened to him at home. He described the inhumane treatment he received at the hands of his step-father and the most shocking, infuriating and saddening part of his story came when he told me that the step-dad had been sexually abusing him regularly and for many years. The child had been threatened with beating, burning and even death if he told anyone about what was happening



to him and so he opted to run away from home every now and again. However the problem was that he was subjected once again to sexual abuse when on the streets by older men because he was young and good-looking. After his mum found out about the abuse she decided to bring him to the home as she was scared for herself and for her daughter and had nowhere to go if she got divorced.

End of story.



- **Location: Palestine street, Baghdad**
Year: 2016

(S), a twelve year old child who spends all his days begging on the streets, starting from 1'oclock in the afternoon to 11'oclock at night and sometimes even midnight. He lives in Al-Rashad district situated east of the city of Baghdad, which is relatively far away from where we are situated in Palestine Street. This makes his to stay until very late at night very dangerous, considering the security situation in the city, his young age and his good-looks all of which put him at risk of harassment. For the reasons mentioned we open our door for him every day and invite him to dinner with our children. One day I decided to hold a meeting with him in order to find out his story and the reason behind him begging. He told me that he is the youngest of three brothers, the eldest of whom is 18, the middle child is 16 and he is 12. He told me that he is a primary school student in year 5 and that he goes out begging after school because his mother makes him. At this I interrupted him to ask if his brothers worked or if they were students, to which he replied that they are neither instead they spend most of their days and nights on social media. He said his mother sends him out to work because his father left them for another woman and stopped asking about them and he is the youngest in the family. I asked him how much he earns a day from begging and he said around thirty or forty thousand dinars a day. I then asked how much of it he keeps to himself and he responded saying I take 5 thousand and the rest is for my mum. End of story.



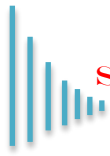
- **Location: Palestine Street, Baghdad**
Year: 2016

Someone called me at around 11'oclock at night to tell me about a child that was sleeping in 'Al- Alawi' garage, that he now had him with him and was hoping that I would agree to bringing him into the house. I told him that I had no problem at all and that he could bring him. The man was a bus driver who took passengers from Al-Sadr city to 'Al- Alawi' garage and back. The man and child were on their way to our safe house and the curfew in Baghdad was in less than an hour so he had to hurry in order for him to drop off the child and make it back home in time. Indeed the man had dropped of the child and called to inform me that he had handed him over to the patrol officer in the safe house. I told him that he had fulfilled his role and that I would call him the next morning and ask him to sign a few papers that prove he had handed the child over, to ensure the process was legal, he told me he would be waiting for my call the next day and that was over.

I left the child for a few days so that he could blend in with the rest of the children, also so that he could feel safe and secure as he seemed tense, worried and afraid and so I wanted to build his self-confidence and help him grow accustomed to the place. After a while I had a meeting with him so that he could tell me his story. Put simply his story is that he is a child from the city of Al-Falujjah from the Jawbar tribe, his parents passed away and left him to live with his uncles. However according to the child his uncles from both his mother's and father's side had joined ISIS. Only he had refused to be like them and so he ran away and joined others on their journey of displacement from Al-Fallujah to Baghdad. He faced many problems on his way, once he reached the area of Abu Gharib a man took him in and asked him to come and live with him and his family as though he was one of his



children. The child was very happy to hear this only his joy did not last for long as he was exploited by the man and used for both labour and begging from morning to night. The man required that the child pay him a sum of money daily and if he failed to earn it he would be beaten, humiliated and even burnt with fire. These were the conditions the boy lived in for a very long time. The child thought of running away and heading to Baghdad, only the problem was that his civil ID card was with the man and so he had to figure out a way to get it back. He decided to use the man's young daughter and convince her after giving her some chocolate to steal the ID card and bring it to him, and she did. The boy was able to escape the greedy, brutal and inhumane man. One he reached the area of 'Al-Alawi' garage the child was subject to harassment by other children in the area. However he was saved by the bus driver and brought to us and today he is an excelling student in school. He studies English and dreams of one day becoming an actor after a time when all he wished for was to find a safe place to sleep in.



- **Location:** Al-Kilany shrine (the resting place of Sheik Abdul-Qader Al-Kilany) in Baghdad

Year: 2016

Time: 7:30 pm

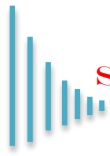
I received a phone call from one of my friends asking me if I was present in the Iraqi home, I said yes. He then told me that there were two lost children in the Kilany shrine, and that the shrine security guards had been taking care of them for the past two days. He asked if they could be brought to the house, to which my response was that I had no objections and that he could bring them. Indeed in half an hour they were brought into the house looking very scared, the eldest was 8 and the younger one was 5. Their father was a martyr, he was amongst the fighters for the Popular Mobilization Forces. Their mother had dropped them off at the sanctum, given them their belongings (civil ID cards) in their hands and told them that she would be back in a short while. She hadn't returned yet however the boys were still holding on to the hope that she would return because she had promised them. They were in the care of the shrine guards for two days in hope that their mother would return, they could simply be lost. However it doesn't seem likely, especially since the children had said there were men with her, claiming to be their uncles. Only God knows. However all that matters is that the children are safe here in our safe house, the mother has disappeared and her secret with her.

End of story.



Third Chapter

The project of Thahabi's dream



A safe home for childhood

Regarding Thahabi's dream: "safe home for childhood" I undertook many meetings with people in positions of influence and responsibility in the Iraqi government, most prominent among them the Iraqi Prime Minister Dr. Hayder al-Abadi, Dr. Hamid al-Mosawi the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Mr Mohammed al-Tamimi the director of the office of Citizens Affairs in the General Secretariat for the Council of Ministers. The project reached the President of the Parliament via Dr Athra' abd al-Ameer the advisor for Sporting Affairs. I met with Minister of Youth Mr Abd al-Hussein Abtan and sent the project in the hands of Dr Azhar al-Shakhly to the Minister of Trade. I met the Minister of Employment and Social Affairs Mr Mohammed Shaya' al-Sudani along with with the Mayor of Baghdad Mr Ali Tamimi, in addition to other figures from politicians to the general directors and parliamentarians.

I met all of these people for the sake of the homeless children and in the hope of treating this phenomena which has spread and become a bleeding wound in Iraqi society. A wound which threatens it's future as this generation of the future will be raised in the streets. None of them communicated with me properly during this process, some even mocked me while others even doubted my intentions. Others did not listen to me as if it was a matter that meant very little to them, as if I was speaking about a problem or social phenomena in another country other than Iraq. Others would say to me, what is more important the security situation or the children? Only the Mayor of Baghdad truly communicated with me even though the communication was not on an adequate level. We enquired if it was possible to grant us a piece of land to establish the project and he merely sent a letter to the Ministry of Trade giving them a choice between investing in or

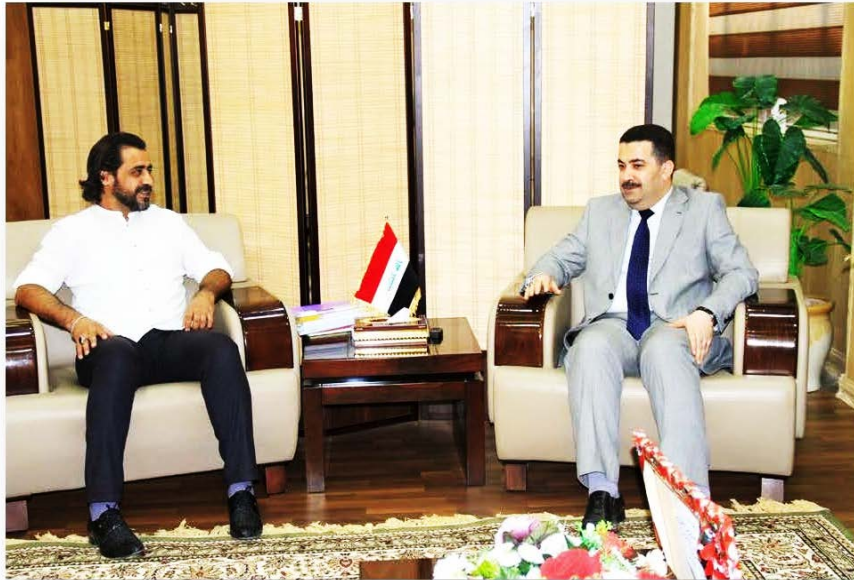


renting out the building and after that possibly giving it to us but they didn't answer and eventually they presented numerous excuses to which I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. One of the excuses was that it was not permissible to change the "type" of building despite the fact the building changed "type" several times between the fall of Saddam and now, from that you can tell what kind of people I was dealing with. More importantly than that, an official from the state came to me and said "Sir, make sure you are careful, those people are gangsters" I considered this to be a veiled threat of some kind.

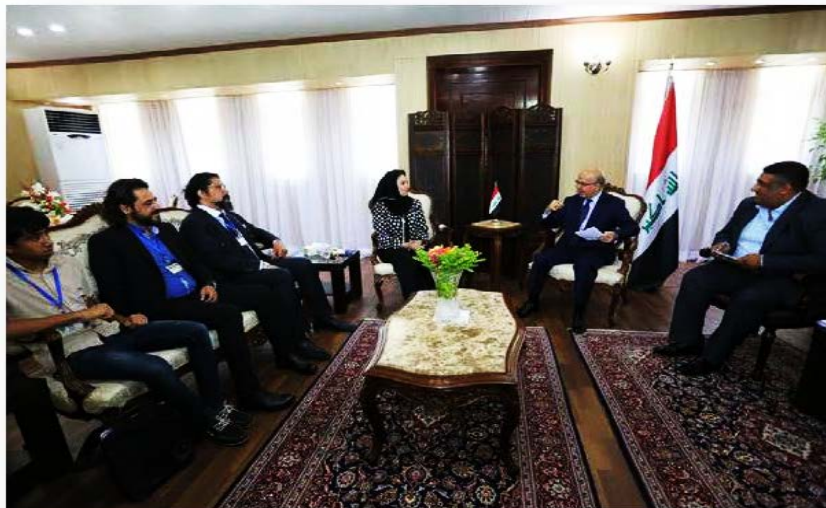
Below I will elaborate on all the officials from the state I met with:



1: I undertook a meeting with Prime Minister **Dr Hayder al-Abadi and he was briefed regarding the project by the director of the Iraqi intelligence and the director of the office for Citizens Affairs through the Secretary General for the Council of Ministers.**

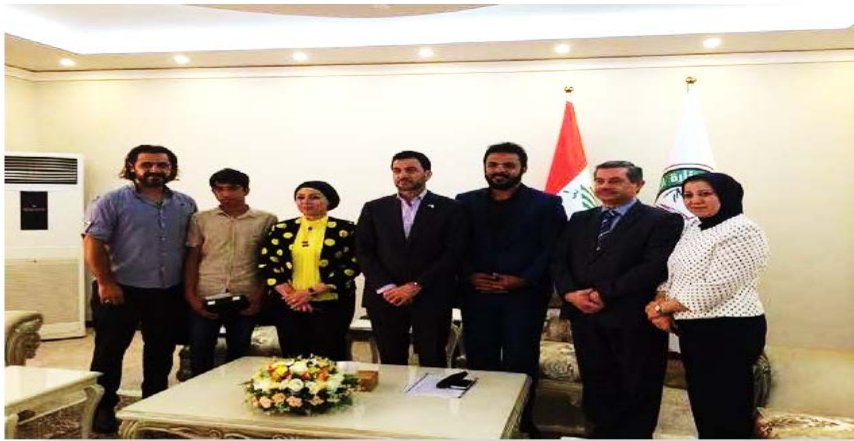


5. A meeting was held with the Minister of Employment and Social Affairs **Mr Mohammed Shaya' al-Sudani** and he informed me that the project reached him after he had transferred from the office of the Prime Minister.

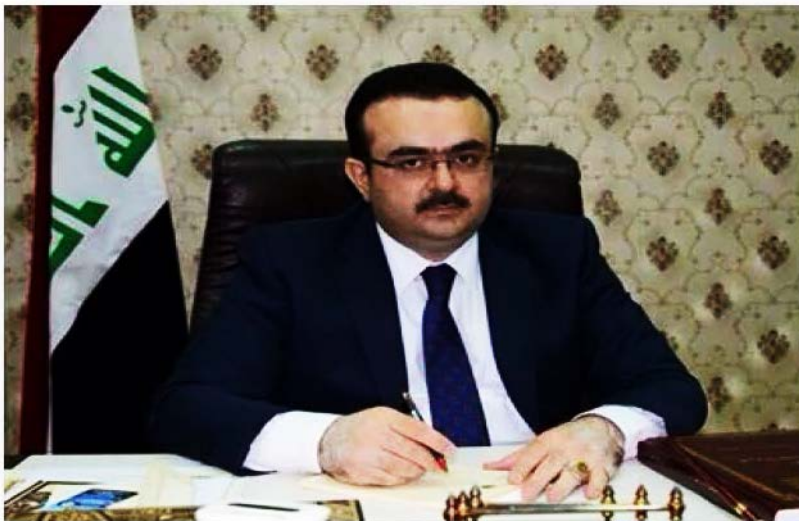


2. A meeting was undertaken with **Dr Hamid al-Mosawi** the Secretary General for the Council of Ministers and a photocopy of the project was submitted to him.

n.m.



. 6. A meeting took place with the Minister of Youth and Sports **Mr Abd al-Hussein Abtan** and he was also given a photocopy outlining the project.



7. The project was sent to the Minister for Trade Molas **Mohammed Abd al-Kareem** via **Dr Azhar al-Shakhly**.



4. A meeting took place with the Mayor of Baghdad **Ali al-Tamimi and a photocopy of the project was submitted to him.**



8. Representative for the Ministry of Culture **Mr Fozy al-Artooshy attended our first conference and promised that he would do his upmost to achieve Thahabi's dream which would serve an important segment of Iraqi society.**



11. Individuals from our societies regarding the project.



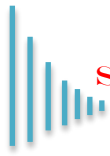
12. The conference which was held in a Baghdad hotel with the aim of defining the project for those present, it's importance and aims.



9. A group of prominent figures who support our project



10. Individuals from our societies to crystalize the project and define our tasks.



**Childhood's Safe House **

The Project:

We here appeal throughout our project to relative authorities; to the fore of them; the Ministry of Trade, as we request cooperation to achieve this project, through their kind approval of giving us "Al-Mustansiryah Central Mall" building, so that we can make our project: "Childhood Iraqi Social Center", to be in service of the great sector of our beloved children. And we appeal to the rest of ministries and relative authorities to cooperate with us, knowing that we ask the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to be the sponsor for this project, and the direct supervisor on it. In this way we'll assure for everyone our true intentions in dealing with formal and governmental ministries and departments, and we refer this request also to other relative ministries (Ministry of Interior \ Ministry of Education\ Ministry of Health\ Ministry of Human Rights\ Baghdad Municipality\ Baghdad Governorate), in order to form committees in this respect, that will follow and support our work to achieve its goals successfully and to present it completely and properly.

- **Introduction:**

After years of regression in all life aspects; in health, educational, cultural domains and services, which left traces on our children's life in Iraq, turning them into much older individuals than their actual age of innocent childhood, as they lost the most important factor for healthy childhood; the social and psychological peace. They've started a race to live inside much older personalities –in many aspects of life, primarily as the sponsor personality, for they had to run extended big families despite their very young age, as their fathers left the home by choice, force or deliberately, or due to negligence or laziness to work instead of their children, so they had to take the left-responsibility on their custody to get all family needs, by working in jobs that are unsuitable at all to their age; as blacksmiths or carpenters or in fixing cars or as heavers with weight lifting carriages, or in other jobs



irrelative to being a child who must have a time of innocent childhood which is full of playing and enjoying his mates, while he's left to be a beggar in traffic stops and control points, or to be a thief slave for those who exploit children for human trafficking in these bad jobs, or even to be vulnerable victims to the use and exploitation of terrorists and infidel-accusers groups which finds their objectives in those children to be brain washed and recruited.

All these causes had led us to think in a serious and actual way to pick up those children from their bitter reality to be returned to the right reality they should live in, as a suitable life worthy of them as children.

The Importance of the Project:

- 1- Targeting the neglected and abandoned sector from the society; the sector of homeless and peddler as well as beggars children.
- 2- Renovation and remodeling as well as rehabilitation of an abandoned building, to be invested to serve this important sector of society: the children.
- 3- Working on uniting the efforts of many civil society organizations and associations in one activity that serves this important sector -the children-, every one of them inside its own field of specialty.

• The Project Goals:

- 1- Taking care of homeless children, to focus on them and to highlight their life.
- 2- Delivering a message to all other sectors of society; that homeless children are the victims not the accused parties, and that they didn't chose to live this way.
- 3- Engaging graduates of Psychology departments in this project, through submitting a proposal to Baghdad and Mustansyriah Universities to permit students to have a voluntarily practice for two months in this project, in



order to gain practice experience, and to have actual field applied experience in their field of specialty.

- 4- Proving that: All children can be creative, despite their backgrounds and environment, if they have the right attention and the good suitable environment.
- 5- Promoting the self confidence in homeless children, that will change the way they underestimate themselves with low self esteem.
- 6- Working on educating the children with useful things and respected careers' knowledge that can serve them well in future, to be self-sufficient who spare the need to others.
- 7- Founding a real project on a real ground can be a seed for other bigger projects in other places in Iraqi governorates.
- 8- Gathering the data base about all those children and their social and health status, their environment and the causes of being in streets with other important information can serve relative departments in dealing with this sector of society.
- 9- This project gives classification of environments and targeted children, and locates poor areas with social problems for those families. This way we can deal and focus on the most important social problems to find solutions for them.

- **Volunteers Groups:**

- 1- Volunteers of field survey, to locate the gathering points for those children, and to bridge the gaps with trust between us, in order to attract them to the project, this group will be classified as follows:

A- A team of volunteers that will locate the points after making daily mornings\evenings rounds inside Baghdad, and according to a plan of divided zones



and time periods. This step takes from one to two weeks.

B- A team of 20 volunteers to visit these zones - previously located by the first team- and to gain the trust of those children there, through repeated visits, till the children become acquainted to them, through giving some simple presents and providing their simple needs. This step will take from ten to thirty days.

C- A team will collect clothes and some toys and gifts for the children.

- 2- Volunteers to clean and shave for the children and to provide clothes for them.**
- 3- Volunteers to run and operate the video games hall.**
- 4- Volunteers to run the computer hall.**
- 5- Volunteers to run the athletic and sport gym according to sport activities and children types.**
- 6- Volunteers from Iraqi Independent Film Center, as the manager of the center will set the number as needed.**
- 7- Maestro Kareem Wasfi and trainers with him as needed.**
- 8- Psychological and sociological studies team.**
- 9- Etiquette team volunteers.**
- 10- Medical team volunteers.**
- 11- Volunteers for cleaning the building, and as time passes by they will engage the children in this activity according to a cleaning schedule.**

Details of the project:

The project is a social, cultural, educational, art-pedagogical with entertaining sport one, and other services to be delivered too to this neglected and marginalized sector, which needs a lot to be rehabilitated and becomes ready to be re-integrated in the society, and the first thing in this process is to promote the self confidence and to change the low\ attenuation of self



esteem that was resided in their minds about themselves. The project will begin several steps as follows:

- 1- Rehabilitation of the building from inside with individual efforts, depending on the fund raised from donors from well off sector, in addition to funds from local\foreign organizations, after opening a fund box assigned for rehabilitating this building. This building will be divided according to a working plan to include dormitory for the children, activity rooms for (painting\ sculpture\ music\ singing\ sport\ computers\ sessions rooms\ video games\ etiquette\ education..etc), bathes with WCs and other rooms for studying the cases that will be carried out by psychological and sociological searchers\workers.
- 2- Dividing the missions between the volunteers' teams who showed readiness to join us, to start getting into streets in order to locate the gathering points for these children, to bridge the gaps with trust between us, in order to have them getting used to us being around them and for them, all that to pave the way for bringing them by their consent to the place. This step will take from two to four weeks, and during this period the team will distribute some gifts of clothes, toys and some food items on them.
- 3- After this period we offer the children a persuasive invitation to visit the place first just to look, while we already prepared it to captivate their interest as a welcoming home ready to house them, so when they'll walk in it and have a tour, we'll offer them the choice to stay or leave, and give them demonstration about the cause of founding this place and that it was made for them, with all its contents which belong to them, and all the staff are there for them to serve.



- 4- Making audio\video and printed advertisements, to explain the idea of the project and its benefits, goals and purposes intended from it. With this we'll gain the attention of people urging them to support this humane project by being engaged voluntarily in it.**
- 5- Field survey operations made by field surveyors' team will be done during day\night batches.**
- 6- Psychologists and social workers will do their essential mission in the project according to the following steps:**

First stage: Elementary data collection about the following:

A- Household condition.

B- The environment of targeted beneficiary.

C- Family (health, psychological, economical and educational) condition.

Second stage: which includes the following:

A- Data analyses, in order to name problems and to know reasons behind the case, whether it was the individual or the family.

B- Put a complete program to help the targeted beneficiary or the family, after having the problem diagnosed, with a future working plan.

C- Dividing the work between working staff (project manager, social worker officer for this individual beneficiary and integration family worker).

Third stage:

Apply the assigned working plan for execution, and collect all data information about the case during and after this process.

Fourth stage:

The final assessment of the work.

Fifth stage:



Prepare alternatives for the plan in case of failure, and not hiding the facts of failures (some cases can use repetition). Now we give the details and the explanation about each of the mentioned above stage;

First stage\ Elementary data collection about the following:

A- The household: family members, the numbers and if the parents were alive or dead or one of them is dead, or if one of the parents got remarried to another partner or was divorced. And with whom the beneficiary stays, and all about the relationships between the parents and the beneficiary and between each other, also his relationship with his brothers and sisters if there is any, and if there are other sisters and brothers from another parents' partner, and what is the relationship with them.

B- The environment that the beneficiary lives in

The environment where this beneficiary was born and lived in, with all its conditions and circumstances, and the relationship with the neighbors, and welfare condition for those inhabitants in general and its influence on the beneficiary.

C- Family condition:

Health condition\ if there is some chronic illness or incurable diseases or malnutrition.. etc.

Psychological condition\ if one of the parents or both has\have psychological illness that is reflected on their relationship between themselves, or with the beneficiary.

Economical condition\ that includes the welfare condition and their monthly income, and if the house is owned by them or on lease, and –if so- then how much they have to pay for this lease.



Educational condition\ that includes cultural and educational level for the family, and academic attainment for parents\ beneficiary.

Second stage:

- A- Data analysis; to determine the problem and name the cause behind it; is it the beneficiary or the family? all that will be clear from the collected data in first stage, which enables us to diagnose problems that made the beneficiary flee from family to street as a runaway refuge.**
- B- Put a program to assist the beneficiary or the family, after diagnosing problems and drawing a future working plan for both parties. This assistance includes many aspects like material\ immaterial and psychological sides, and the working plan for this beneficiary will determine his way, and how ready and capable he is to be integrated permanently, or to be engaged in a school, or to be offered a job, or to give him a period of time to stay in the project, also to have working jobs for his parents or to pay him a monthly pension through connection with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.**
- C- The work will be divided between members of working staff; the manager and the family integration worker, while the manager of the project will direct social workers to have detailed reports about the case, which will include all the data related to the beneficiary and the family, all according to their in respect specialty, then to be merged in one file for this case and to be submitted to project manager who will determine a working mechanism with this case, and if it was difficult to be solved; then it will be referred to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.**



Third stage:

Commencement of the decided program for the beneficiary, and following up with reports about the case before and after working with it, and making the necessary comparison and analysis, in order to know the size of change that happened, and what are the causes behind that.

Fourth Stage:

Forming an assessment committee for the results of the decided plan for the case, to evaluate the success or failure, and having the strength\ weakness points registered, and knowing how to avoid research staff mistakes in the future – after marking them by the committee.

Fifth Stage:

A substitute program should be set for every beneficiary to be implemented in case of failure in the basic program assigned for the case, in order to avoid breaking the progress of work with it, and to take all possibilities of failure into consideration –including the staff's-, And if so we'll keep repeating the applied plan with another staff.

After knowing the stages of work, I'd like to point out that any project without a set in advance working plan especially for this sector; is a failing project, and the evidences are sharply clear on that when several sheltering organizations and projects had failed because they didn't have a pre-drawn working plan to work upon.

7- When the children are set inside the project and settled; we'll begin classifying them according to their abilities and gifts, and we'll start working on sharpening these gifts, developing and directing them to the right path, this will be done by engaging all the children in the provided activities to watch their performance, and how every case will do in each activity –who will be interacted\uninterested- so the classification can be done.

8- Childhood Iraqi center will have a special place for training and educating the children in photography and acting, so that they'll be classified according to their



gifts for (acting\ photograph\ directing), under the supervision of the director: Atia Al-Deraji with staff of the center experienced in this field, this will be done based on the experience in the Iraqi Safe House Orphanage that produced nearly 12 cinematic movies, one is a long movie and the others are short ones, which harvested many awards, that proves their pre-knowledge of this field.

- 9- Maestro Kareem Wasfi will also classify the children according to their tendency and love for musical instruments, and based on his experience, and will work with them in his special department, and based on his experience in this field after dealing with the children of the Iraqi Safe House Orphanage, that produced several good music players after a period of training in his center and according to a mutual program with the house.

• **The proposed supporters of the project:**

- 1- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.
- 2- Ministry of Human Rights.
- 3- Ministry of Interior (Society Police).
- 4- Ibn Rushd Psychiatry & Addiction Hospital.
- 5- Baghdad Municipality.
- 6- Police Sport Club.
- 7- Psychological Counseling Department in Ibn Rushd College\ Baghdad University.
- 8- Iraqi Association for Educational & Psychological Studies.
- 9- Iraqi Independent Film Center (Director: Mohammed Al-Deraji and Director: Atia Al-Deraji).
- 10- Maestro Keream Wasfi.
- 11- Dr. Athraa' Abdul-Ameer\ Consultant of Head Iraqi Parliament.

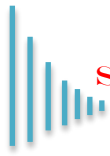


12- Group of young volunteers in theatrical directing, painting and sculpture with other services.

- **Project Term:**

The project lasts for one year, to be considered later for extending the term period.

This period is divided into three sections, representing the activities which will take two months for each one of them.

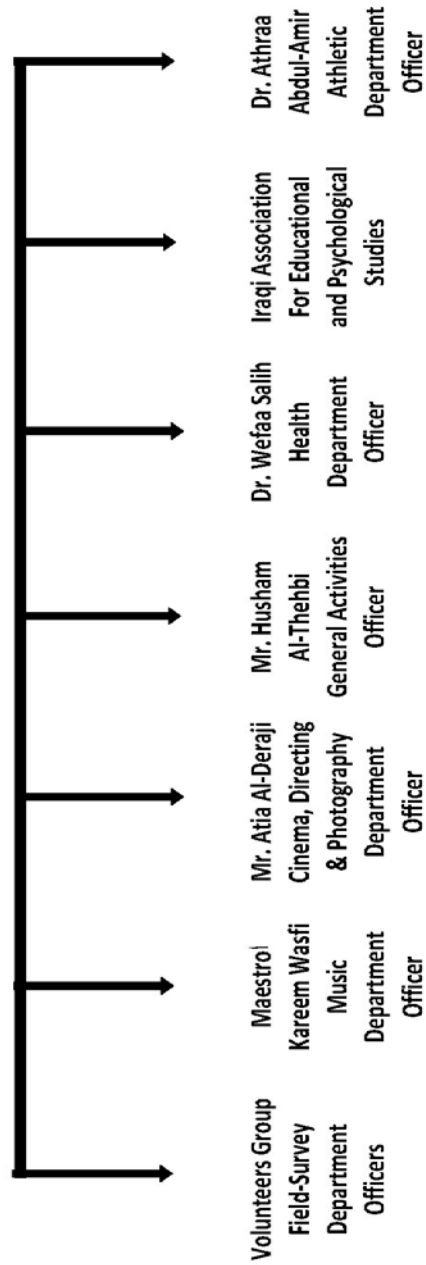


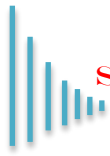
The Project Structure

Childhood's Safe House



The Founders





The project – a safe home for childhood

We appeal to several sides to assist us with this project, the first of which is the Ministry of Trade which we hope will co-operate with us in making this project successful. Specifically we hope they will grant us the central building of the Market of al-Mustansariya which we hope to use to set up our project “A safe home for childhood” and serve a large portion of our dear children. Also we call upon the rest of the ministries and offices concerned to cooperate with us, we request that the ministry of Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs take care of this project and directly supervise it. We reaffirm to all the readers our sincere intention in working with the state and its institutions. We also call upon the ministries and other parties concerned: Ministry of State, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Human Rights, the municipality of Baghdad, the province of Baghdad, we call for the establishing of committees to follow up our project, support it, help it to succeed and provide a complete picture of it in every aspect.



Commentary

After reading previous stories you will find that there are several things that can be summed up as follows: - Most of the children, especially the homeless, including victims whom are be taken away with others who cause that and deprived of their most basic rights, which was supposed to enjoy it and most importantly the warmth of family and good education, and other services that would create a good generation be the pillars of the future and serve the country, alas, I say that these children are victims of the society did not have mercy on them and did not stand next to them and did not bother to looking into the causes of displacement and only monitoring and neglect, but it contributed in one way or another that worsen their condition because it did not think of solutions to their problem and let them face their fate alone. I have intentionally chose the most difficult situations for the children of the homeless do not have the simplest real necessities of life, which could produce us healthy children do not suffer from the contract and psychological problems and also deliberately chose this group because it is the most difficult in terms of integration with the community and the most dangerous to the community and succeeded in reform knowing there are much easier cases and some within the families live, but they did not find it extends them a helping hand and tries to address the problems so aggravated and turned into a psychological contract and turning innocent child to someone oblique and aggressive and violent and enclosed himself the same cannot integrate with members of the community, and this is what I want to concentrate it through my storytelling previous stories, I am trying to re-embrace this child or solo for the bosom of society through hard work and real work and through rehabilitation programs proved successful since we have succeeded with the most dangerous and the most difficult segment it is possible to succeed with the rest of the class



being suffer from the simplest conditions than has happened in the first tranche. If we reviewed the children who have been stories listed, we find there are several reasons led to the displacement of which the economic situation that makes poor families abandon her children and leave them on the street and the other reason is the disintegration of family and we mean a divorce, because in case of divorce, a child with either the father and his second wife or with the mother and her second husband, both of whom did not want the child, so to find that the street is good incubator him and also get us another reason marriages outside the framework of the Court (underage marriage / common-law marriages) or illegal marriages result in children not attribute to parents of specific, and then we see that domestic violence practiced against the child also could lead to the exit to the street to escape the influence of their parents and their cruelty it, do not forget to give the relatives of the child and non-interference in solving his problem with his family also contributes to homelessness and distaste for his family. We knew the reasons and will now ask the outcome of the situation of children in the street, as he was due to his presence for long periods in the street exposed to many other things, repeated his peers physical attacks in the street, or bystanders may develop up to the nationality sometimes attacks up to be a day, To escape this fact, and so the baby bear these attacks forms of child starts becoming addicted to sniffing solvents and adhesives, a condition that exercised even adults when they face difficult circumstances find them to drink alcohol and some of them smoked cigarettes, and then the child's aggressive and violent it becomes to defend the same is also trying to assault physically and sexually on other children younger not to compensate for what he suffered at the beginning of his stay in the street. After that comes our universe and lasting come at times and missed interfere This is the case of our communities that do not address the problems at the beginning and find

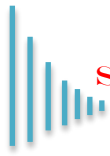


solutions to them but are interfering after he sees the danger began approaching them has hurt her or her reputation, and do not forget we are newcomers to these problems being we have not seen significantly until after 2003 and also the domain is not available to us to work with this segment during the former regime, was an opportunity for me through the children of Kurdistan Protection Organization, which has opened an individual in Baghdad and worked to accommodate these children in the house has been allocated to them, and they results are very good as we mentioned in the stories that we have addressed. Now it's the role of society and the reader who was briefed on the book, and here it to reach the conviction that reform is possible and that any child is easy to make it together children from plans not previously counted include family and children with us and should also shared every effort to governmental and civil society organizations from in order to address this social problem and reduce the phenomenon of homeless children



Some activities for displaced children at the beginning of the project







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