

# CASE STUDY

## Jordan: Early Childhood Development

January 2009

*Save the Children established the Jordan Country Office in 1985 with a special focus on children and families. Since then, our programs have contributed to both social and economic development, and have positively impacted the lives of more than one million Jordanian children and women. Our efforts to improve health care services and education and create economic opportunities for poor women result in real and lasting change for them and for their children.*

Before enrolling in Save the Children's kindergarten program in Irbid, Jordan, Ahmed was afraid to leave his house. The first four years of his life were spent at home in a Baghdad suburb plagued by violence.

"There were bombings and shootings. We were too afraid to let him out of the house," says Raya, Ahmed's mother.



*"Seeing all the children having fun playing with the beautiful toys helped Ahmed break through the barrier of fear."*

After receiving a written death threat, Ahmed's father, a cardiologist, left Iraq in January 2006 to secure a home for the family in Jordan. Raya, a pharmacist, was threatened as well. She followed her husband with the family to Irbid, joining the estimated 2 million other displaced Iraqis in the region. Unlike most Iraqis in Jordan, Raya and her husband were able to find work because of their professions. However, her husband's monthly salary of \$450 for teaching at a local university and her hourly salary of \$5 were barely enough to meet the basic needs of their six family members.

When Raya learned about Save the Children's Khatawat program, she was hesitant to enroll Ahmed. While she understood that kindergarten would help him prepare for primary school, she worried about how he would adjust after his traumatic experiences in Iraq. She agreed to attend a two-day parents' workshop to learn more about it.

More than half of displaced Iraqis are children who are particularly vulnerable. Their families struggle to meet basic needs since most cannot legally work in Jordan and their access to social services is limited.

Furthermore, most kindergartens are private since the Jordanian government only recently provided access to free public kindergartens. Even Jordanian children struggle to gain access to early childhood education. The quality of education within kindergartens varies greatly. The more affordable ones are often staffed by untrained caregivers in poorly equipped classrooms.

After seeing the newly renovated Eidoon Kindergarten and hearing about the program's focus on quality early childhood education, Raya felt more comfortable about sending Ahmed to school. More importantly, she could afford it. Save the Children pays the tuition for vulnerable Iraqi and Jordanian children ages four and five for the two-year kindergarten program.

"I brought Ahmed with me to see the kindergarten, and I could see his tension melt away; he was eager to start. Seeing all the children having fun playing with the beautiful toys helped Ahmed break through the barrier of fear that had built up in him."

Raya is impressed with the changes she sees in her son. Whereas before she struggled to get Ahmed to sleep, he now goes to bed willingly. He gets up early in the morning, dresses himself, collects his school bag and waits for the bus that picks him up at 6:45 a.m. "And with pleasure!" says Raya, amazed. Because of Ahmed's teacher's sensitivity to his needs, he feels safe at school and has built trusting relationships.

"Even on Friday, he wants to go to school. He loves it! He says he misses his teacher. He never misses a day," says his mother.



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