

## **Peace Initiative**

### **Iraq**

### **Ringling College of Art and Design**

### **Sam Siso Hussein**

## **Summary**

The Peace Initiative was mainly concerned with women survivors of sexual slavery, children victims of war and social negligence, and supporting artists. The Peace Initiative provided safe healing spaces for the women and children, and worked to support artists through adoption of their projects.

## **Project Description**

For the women survivors of sexual slavery, children victims of war and social negligence, and artists, we were able to create a support environment for all of these groups over the course of two months. We engaged with an average of 35-55 children on a daily basis, and held a wide range of activities and therapy sessions for women survivors of sexual slavery. We also supported artists (mainly actors and photographers) by hosting and adopting their creative projects.

We were able to deliver our project in 2 months and a half, building a strong team of volunteers to deliver the service. Undoubtedly, the amount of work done was incredible and almost perfect in the program's execution.

I have been trying to help and volunteer in the Yazidi Community since 2014, as after the Yazidi genocide we came to know that no one will help us unless we help ourselves. So, I decided to implement this project in Sinjar because the Yazidi people have been through a lot and needed this help. Having previous experience with the community of Sijar and knowing the challenges in the region helped me a lot and made many things more manageable.

Due to political and security reasons we made two significant changes. One was changing the project itself. The second was pausing the project for some time. We had to re-structure the Art Program component of our project because we saw more opportunity in helping artists, and creating art pieces instead of holding only one single exhibition. We also had to pause the project for some security reasons in the area.

We did receive some contributions from other parties in completing our project. but it was a very limited and relations-based contribution and not financial. We faced issues in finding and selecting survivors since only a few organizations had their names and information and refused to share it with any third parties. However, one of our trainers who was a part of another women's rights organization in Sinjar helped to find and select survivors. This was the only contribution we received during the two months of project implementation.

Certainly, after engaging in activities related to children and women survivors, I was certain that helping and working on these types of issues would be the main volunteering and charity priority. These victims went through a great amount of torture and pain that the human mind cannot comprehend. I find it a top

moral cause on my list of priorities in change-making, and I will surely continue working on these issues in the future.

## **Reflection**

Peace means coexistence and harmony. I find peace to be the natural state of being and the universe. Our actions as humans bring war, destruction and harm. But Peace is normal and natural, and a goal that we all should be aiming for achieving.

We were able to offer help in a long-term peacebuilding process through our project, and the effect of our project will be both short and long-term. Short term, we were able to, at least for two months, change the environment that 10 women survivors, 50-65 children, and more than 15 artists were living in. We created and brought them to an environment that was not only respectful and secure, but one that also educate and supported them. More long term, since everyone made relations during the two months, women survivors got to know several organizations that are now helping them through educational courses or financial. Additionally, most of the children's parents that we met were eager to make sure their kids join another space like ours where they can have fun and learn. The same goes for artists that we supported. Short term we were able to produce two plays, and long term we helped them create their theatre group.

Coming from a region of the world that faces corruption and security problems, I have long learned that challenges are part of the process. When we first decided to work on these issues, we started knowing that we will be facing some problems, but we took it as an opportunity to learn and overcome them. After all, if we do not toggle these issues nothing will change. If we were afraid of risk, we must remember that our families and loved ones are part of the same community, and helping the community means helping oneself. On the other side, it is very important to understand that all the work we did was a great learning process for the whole team including me.

I think that talking and listening to survivors and victims of sex slavery was one of the most inspiring moments of my life. No matter how much I saw myself as strong or confident, the amount of strength that they had to have to survive after the trauma is incomparable. This made me realize, and I think it will be true if I speak for the team as well, that our daily problems are nothing in comparison to their struggle both during and after the assault. And because of that, this was one of the proudest works I have personally done in my life.

## **Personal Statement**

Being the third Davis Peace Project granted to be implemented in Iraq, the Peace Initiative has accomplished a remarkable achievement with cohesive components. All the planned goals that were in the project were accomplished in one way or another. And as a team who have worked on this issue, we find it very important to be part of the problem-solving for these humanitarian issues. Every year hundreds of thousands, if not millions of women and children, get abused or neglected by the world to face their fate. It is important and the duty of all of us to embrace them and aim for a better future for them, and only then will they create a better world.