



Healing, Resilience and Non Violent Empowerment for Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Jordan and Lebanon



Nov 2017, Jordan

(About a 16-year-old orphan living in the SOS villages)

People around her claimed she was very violent and aggressive. Her supervisor stated that once she is triggered, she is like an 'untamed bull'. 6 years ago, her father, not sober, beat her mother to death in front of her, and turned himself in. Ever since then, any threatening situation triggers those memories and she attacks. A little comment from a friend at camp triggered her anger and she lashed out and scratched her face. After sitting and talking, she mentioned the techniques of the training and calmed down, saying:

"In these few days, I have learned to forgive my father, and move on with my life. Life goes on, and if you don't move with it, your memories will suffocate you. I forgive him, I forgive my friend. Life is too short."

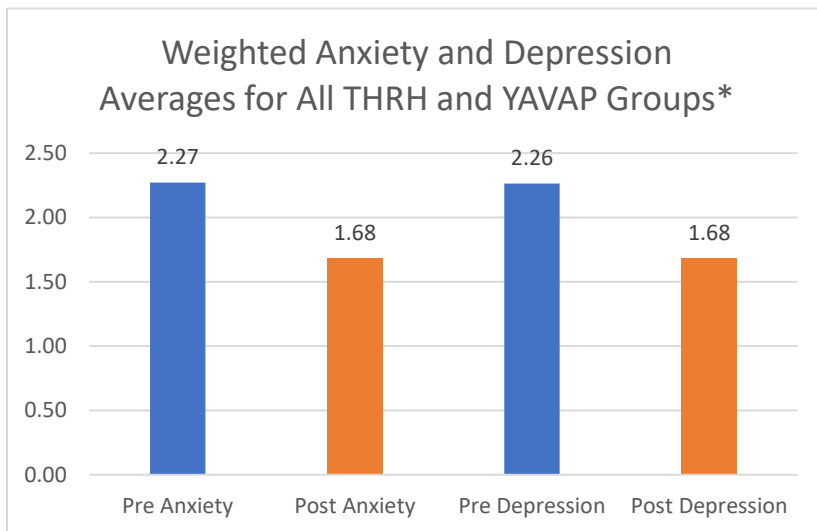


Peacebuilding Project in Jordan



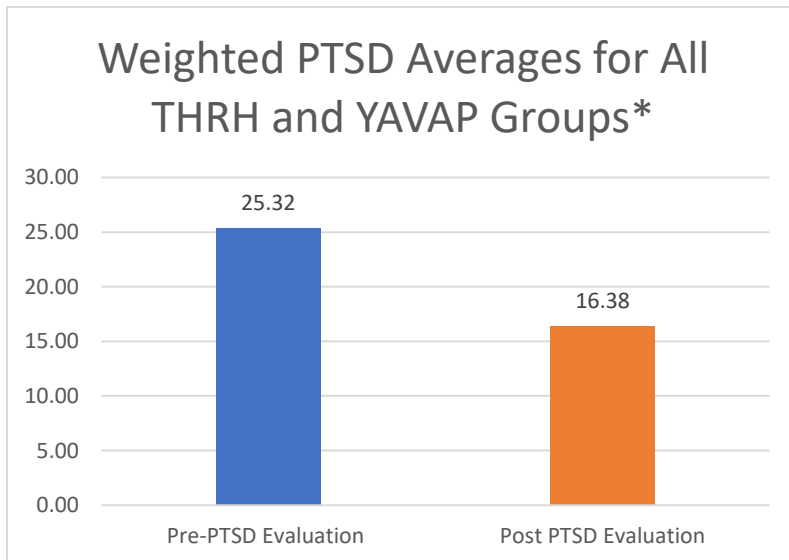
In the Summer of 2017, 204 of the most vulnerable and at risk children and youth from Syria and Jordan graduated from IAHV's intense 5-day Trauma-Relief, Healing and Human Values Trainings (THRH). 60 Syrian and Jordanian youth consequently became Youth Anti-Violence and Peace Ambassadors (YAVAP) empowered to prevent and reduce violence in their schools and communities.

The participants, their supervisors as well as IAHV's trainers all noticed a huge shift in the wellbeing, attitude and behaviour of the children. Children who lacked self-esteem, isolated themselves, displayed aggressive behaviour, or suffered from anxiety, depression and PTSD, gradually opened up, engaged with the training program, became more positive and enthusiastic, and experienced relief from long term traumas. Shy and reclusive children transformed into effective leaders taking responsibility for peace projects in their schools and communities. Conflicts and fights between different groups of children transformed into increased understanding, acceptance and joint singing, dancing and celebration.



Note: Patients with a score higher than 1.75 on Hopkins Symptoms Checklist are considered symptomatic and are most likely to experience significant emotional distress.

*for children with an initial score higher than 1.6



Note: Patients with a score higher than 18.00 on CPSS are considered symptomatic and are most likely to experience significant emotional distress

*for children with an initial score higher than 16.00

Background of the children

The children/youths referred by SOS Village Amman are Jordanian or Palestinian orphans or children with families that are unable to support/raise them. These youths/children, who were the most vulnerable children from SOS village, initially suffered from a lack of hope in life, general distrust and indifference, and often expressed aggressive and uncooperative behaviour.

The children from Jerash referred by Medical Relief were all Syrians who escaped the war. As children, they had not experienced the actual conflict, but were suffering from the toll it had taken on their families.

The children referred by Child Care were all Syrian girls, most of whom did not attend school because their parents were afraid of the violence in schools towards Syrian children.

About a 16-year-old Jordanian orphan: very athletic and energetic, but constantly running around and very hyper. When you see her, you see pure confidence, but when you get closer, she pushes you aside. As the days went by, her tough act was dropped and her vulnerable side showed. After getting into a fight with one of the other girls, she stood for 10 minutes choking on her apology. Upon finally saying it, she collapsed, crying, repeating the words "I'm sorry". That same night, she interacted more with the girls. Before, the girls would blast music and dance each night, but she would shrug and tell us it wasn't her thing. That night, however, she joined in, stood front line, and danced like she has never done before.

The trainings

The trainings were both challenging and beautiful. Some of the boys were particularly aggressive towards one another and the trainers at the beginning of the training. Their hostile attitude towards life exposed their insecurities and lack of self-esteem, all of which could be traced back to their history of different kinds of abuse. Day by day, love and attention paired with the breathing techniques proved to be the remedy for the violence. The violent behavior among the boys reduced dramatically by the end of the training; the boys were able to control their violent tendencies and eventually control their reactions to avoid fights all together.



Peacebuilding Project in Jordan 



Peacebuilding Project in Jordan 

Also certain girls under care were very rude to girls from the other organizations, but during the training they actually made friends and were sad to part ways from the other girls at the end.



Although initially reluctant to do the breathing techniques, most participants later looked forward to the rhythmic breathing portion of the training and became very keen on continuing the practice, seen as it was the reason for their newly found relief. Through these rhythmic breathing techniques, the traumas these children had faced in their lives initially became more evident, before their aggression, isolation and depression were replaced with inner peace. Despite their burdensome past and traumas, the children developed deep connections with their trainers.

In one particular exercise that involved eye-gazing, the participants were fully able to put their nationalities aside, and silently share the true meaning of humanity. In the days that followed, supervisors from our partnering organizations were thanking us for our efforts, as they too had seen a drastic change in the attitudes of their kids.

Feedback from our Partner Organizations

This project is implemented in cooperation with our local partners Madrasati, Islamic Charity Centre Society, SOS and IRD.

The organisations we worked with have been praising the work IAHV has done with the children under their care. The Youth Coordinator from the SOS village informed us that their kids are more confident, calmer, and more hopeful towards their future. The supervisors of the youngest age group were very vocal about their appreciation for the positive energy boost we have instilled in their children. They also observed that earlier the children would separate themselves into groups according to nationality, with the Syrians on one side and the Jordanians on the other. Now they all sit together, sharing stories from their training, playing games, and practising the techniques that were shared with them by our trainers.

Other changes reported by our partner organizations include reduced violence, increased school participation, and restored optimism.



*(About a 16 year old, very conservative and quiet Syrian refugee girl)
Her parents wanted her to benefit fully from the experience and to stay all nights at the camp in order to increase her confidence, so she was the only Syrian present at night. The first night around the bonfire she was scared, looking at everyone clapping and singing and having a good time. When we asked her what her favorite song was, so we could sing it for her to enjoy, she blankly stared back and whispered: "I don't know any music, all I know is the Quran." That same night, she slept with her hijab on, scared of judgement and punishment if she would let go.*

*Each day and after every session, her voice was getting louder.
By the last day, she was sharing opinions and her voice was being heard.
At the last bonfire, she played the Arabic drums herself, banging on them enthusiastically, urging everyone to sing so she could try to follow their rhythm. After watching a film about overcoming obstacles and knowing your true talents, she was the first one to comment, loudly, saying: "Life throws many challenges your way, and it is up to you to take it, and turn it into something productive."*




 Peacebuilding Project in Jordan
 

(About a 14-year-old Syrian who is living with conservative parents)

On the first day she cried, because her parents push her to be perfect, but she cannot: "I cannot get 100% on exams, only 98. If you ask me to dance, I won't, because I know I will fail. If you ask me to sing, I cannot, because I won't know word by word what the lyrics are." Afraid of failure, she refused to try while other girls were singing. For the last night of the training, she asked her parents if she could stay the night. After receiving permission, she packed her stuff and strutted happily the next day. That night, after learning that you need to live the moment as it comes, she got up to dance. First she was scared, but when she saw the encouragement from everyone around her, the clapping and the smiles, she let loose. It was her first time dancing, ever. She didn't know what to do with her body, hips, hands and legs, but she didn't care. She just moved, laughed and shook with happiness, saying she finally felt free.

