

# MEN & BOYS' TRAUMA PROJECT

## IMPACT REPORT

JANUARY 2022



# 2022

**Project date and location:** September– December 2021, Domiz 2 Camp

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**Photography by:** Rebeer, Lotus Flower social worker

The Lotus Flower would like to thank Khaima for enabling us to deliver this extremely valuable inaugural project for men and boys. Because of such kind support, we have been able to make a real difference in reaching trauma-impacted males, and we look forward to future collaborations on such projects.



**Thank you for your support!**



# BACKGROUND

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According to the World Bank, more than 400,000 people have died since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, while UN agencies estimate that over six million individuals have been displaced internally. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), there are currently around 300,000 Syrian refugees living inside and out of camps, and since Turkey launched its offensive in Northeast Syria in October 2019, more than 12,000 individuals have fled into the KRI<sup>1</sup> to seek safety. More are arriving on a daily basis.

Of the newly registered refugees, nearly 75% are women and children and 25% are female heads<sup>2</sup> of household. But while international NGOs and donors provide basic support – including shelter, food, MHPSS and protection services – there is still a critical gap in other services, including for people with special needs and disabilities. The toll on civilian physical and psychological wellbeing has been extreme, and men and boys have largely been excluded from receiving any support services.



Domiz 2 camp is one of the largest camps for Syrian refugees, hosting over 9,600 Kurdish Syrian refugees, made up of a roughly equal number of males and females. While a number of national and international NGOs have been providing basic services within the camp, the impact of COVID-19 has severely damaged the amount of support available. Lacking essential funding to continue, the majority of service providers either left the camp, or had to minimise their services. This inevitably meant prioritising certain individuals, while many others got left behind. In most cases, those left behind were men and boys – and this has been especially true in relation to protection services and mental health support.

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1. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2019/10/5db800254/unhcr-expanding-response-northern-iraq-amid-continuing-syrian-refugee-influx.html>

2. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2019/10/5db2b1644/latest-refugee-influx-iraq-passes-10000-mark-humanitarian-needs-mount-syria.html>

Prior to this project, Domiz 2 had no services specifically for men and boys which provided mental health support, therapy and educational activities. According to local authorities and community representatives who participated in consultation meetings held by the Lotus Flower in August, mental health disorders, suicidal tendencies and gender-based violence have all been rising sharply. This has been especially evident among youths who are stuck at home with little to do, due to the lack of services.



# PROJECT SUMMARY

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In response to the situation outlined above, the Lotus Flower in collaboration with Khaima devised its first ever project aimed at supporting men and boy Syrian refugees who have been badly impacted by conflict and displacement over the past few years. The programme, called 'Men and Boys' Trauma Project', was designed to foster healing through the sharing of past ordeals and mental health therapy, as well as providing educational and holistic activities to encourage self-expression and the processing of feelings through art, music and poetry.

Many of the male beneficiaries saw the atrocities of war with their own eyes, and were beaten or threatened themselves. Others saw women being subjected to violence and abuse, and even innocent men being beheaded. Although they locked away their trauma for many years, intense feelings of anger and fear inevitably built up, which they had no way of articulating or managing. Feelings of shame and social stigma had also prevented them from opening up about their experiences, especially in relation to struggles with mental health.

For this initial project, 25 men and boys were selected to take part, and it began on September 15th 2021, running until the end of December.

## Outcomes

Project timeframe	3.5 months
Art therapy classes	38 sessions
English language classes	42 sessions
Entertainment activities	7 sessions
Individual psychological support	31 sessions
Group psychological awareness	22 sessions reaching 250 beneficiaries in total
Group social awareness sessions	21 sessions reaching 200 beneficiaries in total
<b>Total direct beneficiaries</b>	<b>475</b>



## Timeline

During the project from Sept-Dec 2021, the following activities took place:

- A total of 38 art therapy sessions for the 25 men and boy participants were held, with 10-13 males attending each. Activities included painting, drawing, postcard activities, self-care boxes and family sculpture. These sessions enabled participants to process their feelings, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase self-esteem.
- A total of 42 English language sessions were conducted, with the 25 participants divided into Beginners and Intermediate groups, and between 10-13 people in each. The aim was for the participants to acquire language skills and begin reading and writing in English. Teaching methods included games, film and videos, enabling them to adapt and learn quickly, while creating a warm environment in which they could begin to heal and express their feelings and emotions.



- With support from Khaima, 22 psychological awareness sessions for the 25 men and boys were held, along with other community members. These sessions were conducted by the project psychologist and concentrated on topics including depression, trauma, autism, post-traumatic stress disorder, GBV, MHPSS and social stigma. They were conducted within groups and through community mobilisations with refugee families. By the end of the project, 250 individuals were reached.
- Seven entertainment activity sessions were conducted for the 25 men and boys, which were aimed at creating a fun environment for them to build resilience and friendship, and to start to overcome any psychological issues.
- A total of 21 awareness sessions were held to discuss social issues with the 25 men and boys as well as other community members, reaching 200 individuals in total. The project social worker ensured these sessions provided a nurturing, healing environment, while topics included positive masculinity, anger, social relationships, early marriage, GBV, prevention of sexual exploitation and addiction to technology.
- Individual mental health counselling and case management by the project psychotherapist was conducted for eight men and boys during the final stages of the project. These individuals were those identified as needing further support, and 31 sessions were provided.
- On 5th January 2022, the Lotus Flower and Khaima held a final ceremony to celebrate the achievements of the 25 project participants. They were presented with gifts and certificates to acknowledge their personal growth, while they also performed songs and poems and displayed their artwork.



# PROJECT EVALUATION

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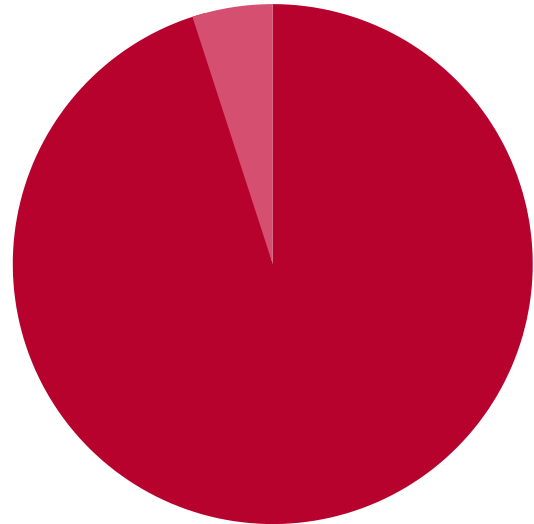
Over five days, the Lotus Flower M&E Officer, with the support from centre staff, conducted an evaluation process with project participants to determine the impact and success of the activities.

Sessions with 20 participants were held, as well as two focus group discussions with eight participants. The questionnaire used a combination of qualitative and quantitative questioning.

Participants were asked about :

- The quality of classes
- The impact of the project activities
- The method of teaching
- The behaviour of the trainer and team

Fair or other  
5%



Good or very good  
95%

When asked to rate the content of the project activities, almost all said they were good or very good.

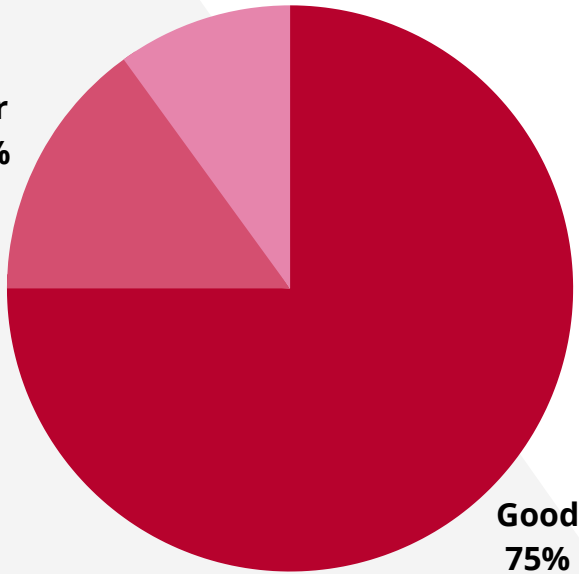


**95%**

rated the project  
teaching as good or  
very good

**Don't know**  
10%

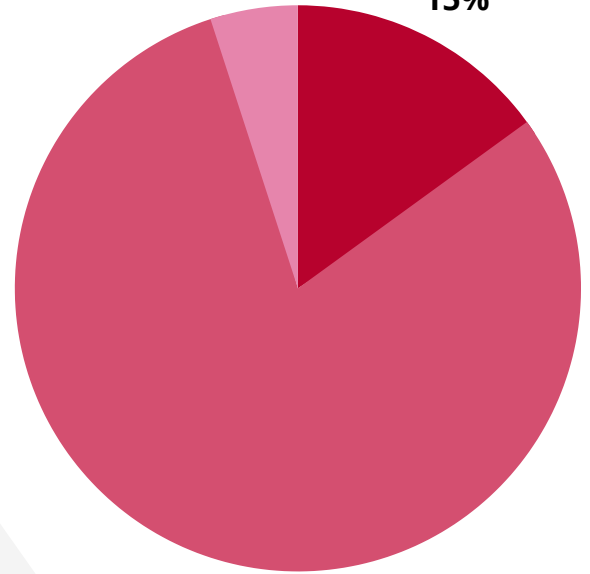
**Fair**  
15%



When asked if the project activities had positively impact on them, 15 out of 20 participants said the impact was good, while 3 indicated it was fair, and 2 said they didn't know

**Don't know**  
5%

**Fair**  
15%



**Good or very good**  
80%

When participants were asked to rate the tools and equipment used in the classes, 16 out of 20 said they very good or good, 3 of them said they were fair and 1 said they didn't know.

"The social awareness classes have affected our lives, family, and our way of dealing with things and issues around us. Even our kids have started being interested in these topics because we keep talking about what we have learned to our families, friends, and the people we know"





# PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

## Programme importance

The majority of participants indicated that a programme like this is hugely needed, since most men and boys have never had the chance to express their emotions or talk about their mental health in the wake of atrocity and years of conflict. While there are support programmes for women and girls, men and boys are often neglected, and this project showed them that their needs matter, too.

Many also stated that it had helped them reestablish connections to their families.

## Sustainability

Most participants agreed that the effects of this project will be long-lasting, and that they are now better equipped to tap into their feelings, express themselves creatively and understand the complexity of their emotions.

Many of the respondents told us that they have never experienced some of the feelings they had during the art therapy classes, and that the sessions brought back happy childhood memories. These helped them explore their feelings and different ways of expressing themselves.

Crucially, half of the respondents also said that the art therapy impacted positively on their children too, as many of them had also begun drawing and painting with them.

**100%**  
**said communication with the project team was good or very good**



# CASE STUDIES

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**Masoud**, 40, is a Syrian refugee who has lived at Domiz 2 camp for eight years. A married father of two young children, he says: "I was glad to participate in the Men and Boys' Trauma project and really liked the awareness sessions. I was pleased to improve my English too. The psychological sessions and therapy were impactful and unique for us as men. I had never participated in such programmes before and I believe 90% of other men and boys hadn't either. This project has helped me improve my skills, rebuild my life and become a better father to my kids, and a better husband to my wife."



**Haval**, 38, is a refugee at Domiz 2 who left his homeland in Syria in 2012. Haval is single and lives with his sisters and mother, and since his father passed away he has taken responsibility for the family. He says: "I joined the Men and Boys' Trauma because of the opportunity to learn English and build friendships with other men from the camp. It has been very effective over the four months. I really liked the psychological sessions, and it was the first time I've had the chance to speak to a therapist. I'm grateful that I spent my time learning, healing and making friends instead of constantly scrolling through social media posts."

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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- For future iterations of the project we would like to secure a bigger teaching and learning space, as the current rooms do not always comfortably accommodate the number of participants.
- During the evaluation process, many participants indicated that they would be keen to additionally receive training in business and career skills, which would help them seek employment opportunities and strengthen their future prospects.
- We strongly advocate the need for this kind of intervention for men and boys in other locations. As mentioned by most of the participants, they have never had the chance to take part in this sort of programme before, and we plan to make it much more widely available so that we can reach many more male beneficiaries.
- As an observational evaluation, while there was an element of risk attached to this project, the men and boy participants embraced these type of activities, as well as the idea of bringing their vulnerabilities to the surface. Previously, social pressures mean men and boys have felt unable to express their feelings in this way, and we believe such expression is fundamental to their healing and future lives.

