

Karlsruhe, October 8th, 2015

The First Day of School in Northern Iraq

Just in time for the first day of school in the refugee camps in the Dohuk region, a volunteer emergency pedagogy team of the Friends of Waldorf Education has once again travelled to northern Iraq. This is now the sixth mission of the German experts in the region.

Since April the Friends of Waldorf Education, in cooperation with UNICEF, have been continually active in the refugee camps near the city of Zakho. A local team made up of nine pedagogues supports the children on site with the processing of their traumata.

But the conditions in the camps are difficult and stressful for the people there, most of whom have already lost everything. Without future perspectives or hope for an improvement in the camp, many see a further flight outside of the country as their only chance. The local team of the Friends of Waldorf Education is trying to work against this lack of perspective. Together with teachers, ways were found to turn the refugee camps' schools into hopeful places. This was accomplished by, among other things, turning the inner courtyard into a small oasis where grass and flowers were planted.

But many of the teachers, who are themselves refugees, do not return to the school for the first day; others are heavily traumatised and can hardly work with their just as traumatised pupils in the camp.

In order to support the local emergency pedagogy team in facing this situation, a team of German pedagogues and therapists were on site from September 18th to October 2nd. During this time, the emergency pedagogy experts were able to offer workshops like art therapy, experiential pedagogy, and music pedagogy to over 1,350 children. They also trained about 40 teachers in the foundations of psychotraumatology and emergency pedagogy. The special focus of this mission's teacher training was to emphasise the importance of self care and to strengthen feelings of self efficacy. For many teachers, the idea that they should care for themselves in order to have energy for their work with the children was a totally new one. Workshops and lectures for teachers and parents were designed to present ways to break free from the victim role, how to indentify inner resources and develop own initiative. Because only adults who are themselves stable are able to support traumatised children.

The next mission is planned for November. It will offer children as well as adults psychosocial aid and strengthen their self efficacy. To accomplish this goal, among other efforts, psychotherapists who live in the camp should be indentified and trained in trauma pedagogy. By experiencing self efficacy, despondency and feelings of powerlessness should be overcome and own initiative should be strengthened.

The joint project with UNICEF continues until the end of the year. In order to be able to continue carrying out emergency pedagogical work with children in the refugee camps in northern Iraq, the Friends of Waldorf Education are dependent on donations.

Emergency Pedagogy: Pedagogical First Aid

During violent armed conflict inner injuries to the soul, most of which are very hard to counteract, come in addition to external damage. Many of the affected persons lose their inner balance and

sicken with trauma related disorders. The Friends of Waldorf Education work with Waldorf pedagogical methods and related therapy forms, which support people in processing their experiences. At the same time, the self healing powers of the affected persons should be activated. For this purpose, experiential pedagogical exercises help to strengthen trust in oneself and in fellow human beings. Movement games serve to resolve torpor resulting from shock. Painting therapeutic exercises offer non-verbal expression possibilities through which distance from the terrible experiences can be achieved.

The emergency pedagogy of the Friends of Waldorf Education has been working in the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Iraq since 2013. In the context of numerous other missions, many children worldwide have already been assisted in processing their traumatic experiences and so called trauma related disorders have been lessened.

Press Contact:

Clara Krug
Press and Public Relations for Emergency Pedagogy
Tel.: 0721-354806 183
Fax: 0721-354806 180
E-Mail: c.krug@freunde-waldorf.de
Website: www.freunde-waldorf.de

Donations Account

GLS Bank Bochum
BLZ: 430 609 67
Account number: 800 800 700
IBAN DE06 4306 0967 0800 8007 00
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*The **Friends of Waldorf Education** are worldwide sponsors of a free education system. Since 1971 they have advocated for Waldorf education and the freedom of education systems. Since 1993 the office in Karlsruhe has organized and supervised international volunteer services worldwide. Since the summer of 2011 it has been possible to complete a 12-month civil service in anthroposophic institutions through the association. Since 2006 the Friends of Waldorf Education have been active in the area of emergency pedagogy. Following the outbreak of a war or a natural disaster, they worked with psychologically traumatized children and adolescents in Lebanon (2006), China (2008 and 2013); Gaza (2009-2013), Indonesia (2009), Haiti (2010), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Japan (2011), and Kenya (2012-2013), the Philippines (2013-2015), Kurdistan-Iraq (2013-2015), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), and Nepal (2015).*



Freunde der Erziehungskunst ist Mitglied im Bündnis Aktion Deutschland Hilft, dem Zusammenschluss renommierter deutscher Hilfsorganisationen, die im Katastrophenfall ihre Kräfte bündeln, um gemeinsam schnelle und effektive Hilfe zu leisten.