

Transforming Lives through Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

World Vision's Interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon

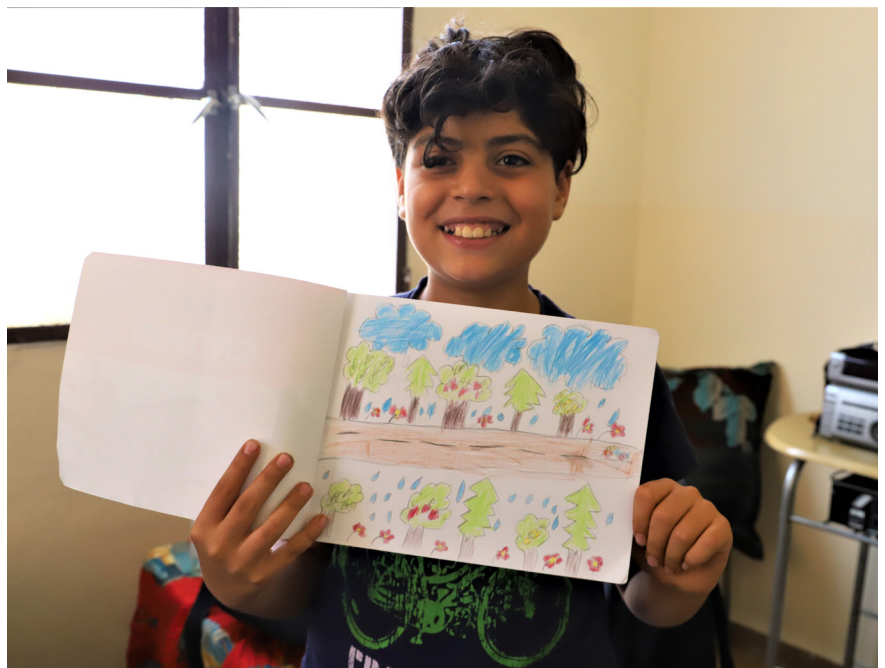
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World Vision has been working to improve the mental health wellbeing of the most vulnerable children and their families in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, including Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In recent years, these countries have encountered a number of compounded crises including the exacerbation of violence, displacement, economic crises and poverty, as well as the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Together with its partners, World Vision has created and contextualized various Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) interventions to meet the needs of children and families in humanitarian and fragile contexts. By listening to families and children, we are able to tailor MHPSS services to their needs and enhance their wellbeing and resilience, particularly in unstable settings.



A child-friendly space in Iraq where fun psychosocial activities take place. © World Vision.



Jamil, a cancer and Beirut blast survivor, smiling at the camera while showing his painting. © World Vision.

AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan, World Vision has reached 1,369,562 individuals – among whom 669,868 were children – in 2022 across programming. [World Vision Afghanistan \(WVA\)](#) conducted a number of MHPSS activities, including:



Training 1,200 teachers and 1,000 community members on psychosocial support and child protection in emergencies



Providing psychosocial support to 2,000 children affected by conflict and displacement through child-friendly spaces and mobile teams



Established 20 community-based psychosocial support groups for women and girls to cope with stress and trauma



Integrating MHPSS into health and nutrition projects, such as screening and referring children with mental health and psychosocial challenges to specialized services



Developing a MHPSS curriculum for community-based education and life skills programmes to enhance the resilience and well-being of children



Counsellor providing psychosocial and life skills lessons for parents and children in Afghanistan. © World Vision.

During previous years, WVA has also built Child-Friendly Spaces, which are safe spaces where children can participate in recreational activities, receive psychosocial support, learn life skills through education, and receive child protection services. Psychological First Aid (PFA) trainings were also provided to frontline workers and volunteers who in turn supported children and families facing distress and adversity. This helped with the establishment of a network of community-based psychosocial facilitators trained to provide PFA and able to support with the referral of vulnerable family members and children to life saving services.

Moreover, WVA has designed and distributed a Family Well-being Toolkit, which contains information and activities on themes such as stress management, positive parenting, communication skills, and COVID-19 prevention.

STORY: Counselling sessions help a young girl in Afghanistan build long lasting friendships

“When I used to fight with my brothers and friends, I used to be rude and couldn’t control my anger, but after a few minutes I would feel remorseful and tormented,” said 13-year-old Khurshid*, who suffered from the habit of getting excessively angry when responding to even minor issues.

She did not like to be among people; she preferred to be alone and for that reason, she didn’t have many friends. But everything changed for her in a few months, “a counselling session at the Psychosocial Support (PSS) Centre changed my life,” she said.

The World Vision-supported PSS Centre in Afghanistan provides an environment where participants can make new friends, benefit from counselling sessions and most importantly learn life skills such as making decisions, controlling anger and stress, building self-confidence, building trust, and other essential skills.

“As I left the counselling room, I made the decision to control my anger and emotions,” said Khurshid*. “My counsellor helped me understand why I was unable to make friends.” The PSS Centre transforms lives, and the young girl is now able to build strong friendships and be happy. “I am happier now and enjoy my life more than I did in the past. I love being with my friends, playing with them and talking to them,” she said with a smiling face.

With support from AHF funds, World Vision Afghanistan established a PSS Centre in Ghor Province under its Protecting Conflict-Affected Children and Families Project. By the end of this project, 13,800 individuals were reached through different activities such as case management and referrals, PSS counselling sessions, life skills sessions, parenting sessions and distribution of PSS kits.

* Name has been changed for safeguarding purposes.



A counselling session for girls in Afghanistan. © World Vision.



IRAQ

In Iraq, World Vision implemented a variety of MHPSS initiatives, in response to conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic serving more than 50,000 adults and children with protection and MHPSS services in 2022 and 2023. These initiatives included:



Creating a Family-Based Psychosocial Support (PSS) kit that provides guidance and activities for parents and children to cope with stress and anxiety



Incorporating MHPSS into education and life skills programs for youth



Providing specialized and non-specialized mental health services to people who had experienced distress and trauma



Adapting MHPSS interventions to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as providing remote counselling and support



Providing financial support to small business owners to improve their mental health and overall wellbeing

These measures helped in meeting the changing demands of Iraq's vulnerable children and families. [World Vision Iraq](#) collaborates with local partners to ensure that initiatives are culturally acceptable and easily accessible, while also providing capacity building on MHPSS to guarantee the provision of high-quality services. Children who used the PSS kit with their families reported feeling less tense and anxious. In addition, people accessing specialized or non-specialized mental health and psychosocial support felt more prepared to cope with trauma and psychosocial distress. Those who received adapted MHPSS interventions on COVID-19 reported feeling less stressed and apprehensive about the pandemic. More importantly, adolescents who participated in PSS and/or Social and Emotional Learning interventions in school – as well as life skills programs – reported feeling more resilient. In addition, adults who benefited from trainings and grants for small business also reported improved mental health wellbeing.



MHPSS counsellors in Iraq
© World Vision.



STORY: Mustafa is dreaming big after years of suffering

Mustafa's early childhood was ordinary. He was happy, cared for and felt his childhood was complete. During his years at primary school, he was one of the high achieving students. In the last year of primary school, he even ranked fifth among his fellow graduates.

However, as he entered the first year of secondary school, he started to feel different and scored low on his exams. His younger brother suffered from a disability and Mustafa would spend a lot of time caring for him, feeding him, and washing him. Taking the responsibility of his younger brother at such a young age coupled with finding time to study and the financial struggles of his family, exhausted Mustafa mentally. "I suffered from psychological fatigue at a young age. I went to the psychiatrist, and he prescribed me some medication. Sometimes I would

fall asleep and sometimes I would feel better," he said.

Although Mustafa was struggling in school, he eventually managed to make it to the final year of high school. He was also working at a shop that sold gardening supplies to support his family. Ultimately, Mustafa was under so much pressure that he ended up dropping out of high school.

Mustafa is now twenty-seven. Since he couldn't complete his education, he started to assist his father at a veterinary shop. During those days, his psychological condition started to slowly improve. Earlier this year, Mustafa's elder brother saw an advertisement for a ten-day business management training offered by World Vision Iraq in Partnership with UNDP and with funding from BMZ and KFW. He immediately registered Mustafa's name for the training program.

Mustafa was chosen out of 580 applicants eligible to participate in the program based on vulnerability criteria. "The training was about management and economy. We learned how to promote and market a business. It nurtured optimism in me and I was able to meet lots of new people. My psychological condition became better. I am feeling better and more optimistic," he said.

Mustafa also received a financial grant from the project. Through the grant, he bought supplies and equipment to open a store of animal feeds. Mustafa feels happy that he can do something useful with his life. He shared, "It is the first time in my life to open a store. My income has increased. Before, all the money would go to home expenses and daily life consumptions but now I have an income and I have a hope to live from."



Mustafa in Iraq is having big dreams after years of mental health suffering thanks to World Vision's support to his small business. © World Vision.

The provision of support to micro, small, and medium business owners can help individuals like Mustafa gain useful business skills while also improving their mental health and quality of life. Through this project in Tal Abtah, 70 individuals received business trainings, of these, 57 received financial grants to develop their own projects. Throughout the whole project in Ninewa, 204 persons received business management trainings, and 170 persons received financial grants.



LEBANON

In Lebanon, World Vision reached 473,359 individuals including 171,302 children to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus and reduce its impact on vulnerable children and families. World Vision Lebanon also responded to the Port of Beirut Explosion of August 2020 and delivered assistance to 169,313 individuals including 67,234 children. Under its Child Protection and MHPSS programming, World Vision Lebanon contributed to creating a protective environment that supports the wellbeing of children, by focusing on:



Providing prevention and response to Violence Against Children (VAC), with a particular focus on violent child discipline at home and in schools



Child Labour prevention and response programming, especially the worst forms of child labour such as street work, garbage or metal picking



Provision of community-based PSS activities and focused non-specialized PSS to children and caregivers



Working with faith leaders and key community stakeholders to promote child protection and mental health care through social behaviour change

[World Vision in Lebanon](#) created a digital platform for its Focused Psychosocial Support (FPSS) intervention. This program enables the most vulnerable children to receive psychosocial care from anywhere in the country, recognizing accessibility and play as crucial criteria for

successful child engagement and learning. Collaborated with faith-based organizations was also key to increasing awareness about sensitive issues such as child safety, mental health and psychosocial stigma, psychoeducation, and COVID-19 prevention.



World Vision in Lebanon is providing counseling to help ease the caregivers burden. © World Vision.

STORY: Jamil, twice a survivor, forever a hero

“Stay with your sister” are the last words that Jamil remembers from August 4, 2020. He didn't scream back then as he remembers, he did not even cry as he recalls. Jamil was in shock. Thoughts came across his mind, “were these the last words I will ever hear? Is this the last time I hold my sister's hand?” This 11-year-old cancer survivor is now a Beirut blast survivor too.

It was a regular day. Jamil and his younger sister Sharifa were home with their parents in the Al-Jisr area of Beirut. “It was a regular day, my sister and I were in the bathroom washing our hands after having dinner, and suddenly a huge explosion shook our home. We heard the sound of glass shattering all over and cars sirens went on, and loud screams filled the area,” says Jamil. “Luckily we were in the bathroom, the only place in our home that doesn't have a window,” he adds.

“The aftermath of the explosion was horrible, my sister Fifi - as he calls her - still gets a shiver every time she hears a loud sound”, Jamil explained, “whenever she feels afraid, I hold her tight and tell her that everything will be okay.”

World Vision in Lebanon, in partnership with the local NGO “Tabitha for relief and development”, provided psychosocial support to families affected from the Beirut blast.

“Being able to attend the online psychosocial support sessions and providing me with a tablet to make this possible, meant a lot to me, especially after all what I've been through in the past three years from dealing with cancer to the Beirut blast. I learned how to express my feelings whenever I feel nervous and frustrated by doing some activities that I like, such as drawing and playing football.” Jamil elaborated, “I also learned that problems are like balloons. They start small, they might get bigger but eventually, they fade away,” says Jamil. “For me, attending these sessions



Jamil and his younger sister Sharifa, whom he tried to shield from the Beirut blast. © World Vision.

was fun and beneficial at the same time, and I will definitely enrol in the upcoming sessions,” he adds.

Jamil is one of 570 children who experienced a tragic incident that will likely never be forgotten. Nevertheless, with the help of World Vision's psychosocial support sessions, they were able to find the support they needed to start their recovery and resume their childhoods. Jamil's ability to fight and resist cancer made him a hero and a survivor. On top of that, getting through the Beirut blast, both physically and psychologically, made him a survivor for the second time and a hero in the eyes of his loved ones.

World Vision is committed to continuing its support, through developing a novel community based MHPSS interventions that are adapted to the diverse individual needs of children and families in the Middle East and Eastern Europe Region (MEER). World Vision's MHPSS programs are improving the lives of children and families in some of the toughest places to be a child such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon. Children who participated in these programs reported improved mental health well-being and coping skills. In addition, families that participated in these programs reported feeling better equipped and capable of dealing with the challenges they face, thus increasing resilience in the most vulnerable communities.

Listening to children and their families and uplifting their voices is key to successful MHPSS approaches in unstable contexts. World Vision's is determined to continue providing this critical assistance in hard-to-reach places, with the aim of having a lasting positive impact on the lives of those who need it most.

World Vision have been working in the [Middle East and Eastern Europe \(MEER\)](#) for more than 45 years and currently have projects in more than 15 countries. Serving the most vulnerable children in the toughest places, World Vision is leading the way in contexts of high fragility and gender disparity, supporting children on the move and affected by armed conflict, in a region beset by climate change and the global hunger crises.

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