

The background features a stylized landscape with light blue hills at the top, a tan ground area, and a blue strip at the bottom. On the right, a person wearing a dark blue hijab and a brown long-sleeved top is shown from the side, writing on a white scroll with a quill pen. The scroll is partially unrolled, and the person's hand is positioned at the end of it. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

# **A Safe Harbour**

Book of Stories



**A Safe Harbour**

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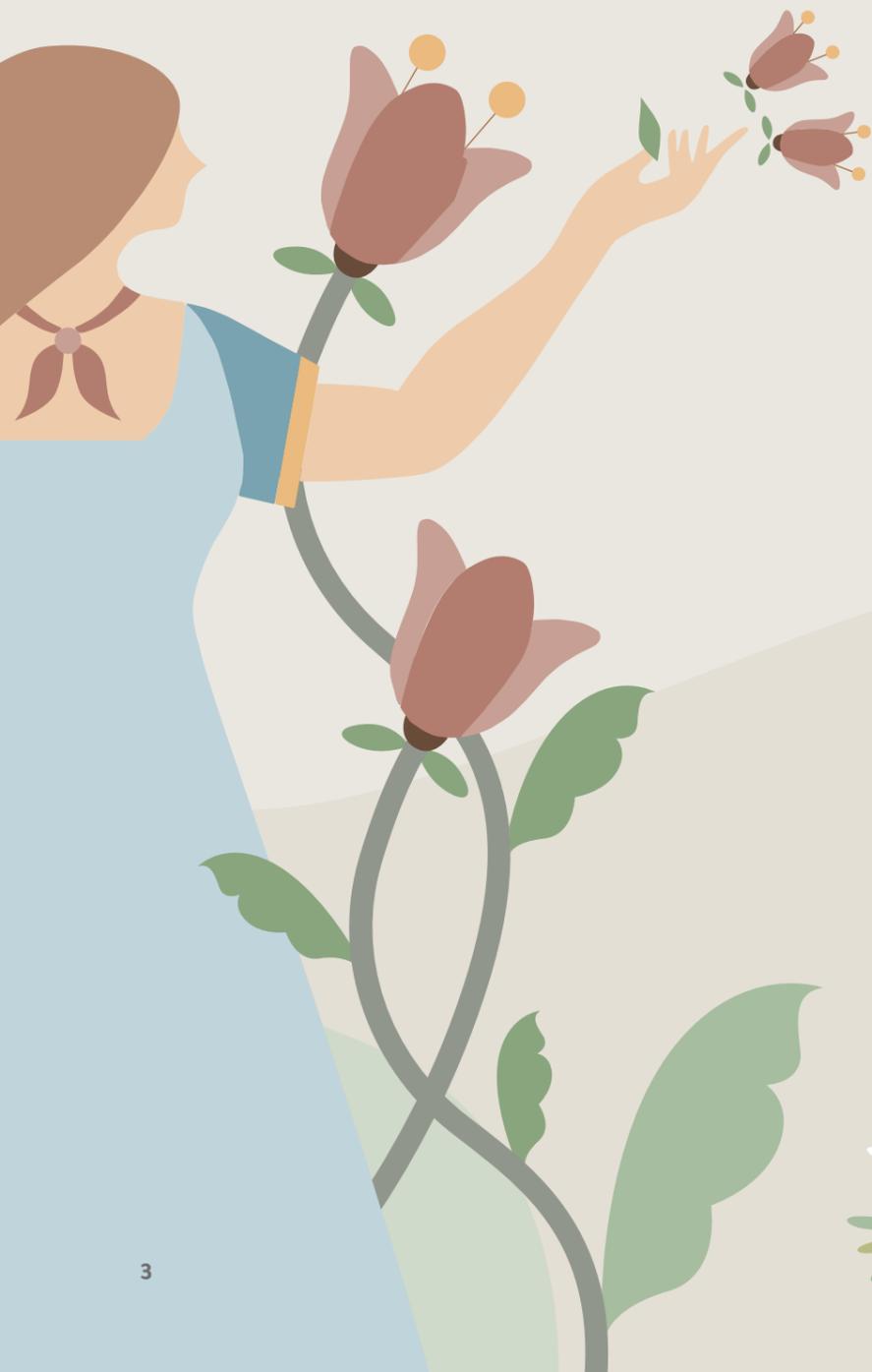
## Acknowledgment

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to everyone who made this programme a success.

To those who volunteered to shorten the distances and build mutual spaces in hope of changing their lives and the lives of others.

To those who embraced new challenges in search for their true selves, and to the courageous ones who shared their inspiring stories to light up the path for others...





## About the Programme

Generations For Peace (GFP) implemented the “Improving Protection Spaces and Practices Programme (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities” in partnership with The European Regional Development and Protection Programme for Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq (RDPP II) a joint European initiative supported by the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Union, Ireland and Switzerland.

The programme built the capacity of 26 core members from the Ministry of Youth (MoY) on protection and gender-based violence (GBV). Those members have, in return, strengthened MoY staff capacity on national referral pathways and case identification, as well as on the newly developed MoY Protection Protocol.

The programme created structures and facilitated opportunities for vulnerable refugees and host community youth in Jordan to come together and identify the local issues of violent conflicts arising amidst the Syrian refugee crisis.

Twenty-two regional trainings were conducted in the 13 MoY directorates through which 320 MoY staff have received training in the core thematic areas. Aiming to develop the capacity of Syrian and Jordanian youth to implement Advocacy For Peace activities in their communities, the programme has also trained and raised the awareness of 60 volunteers, who have shared their knowledge with 300 youths in 4 governorates (Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, and Zarqa). Youth were also engaged in 120 ongoing Advocacy For Peace sessions, 20 community events, and community needs assessments, each within their own communities, creating a positive lasting impact on their lives.

Furthermore, 80 selected centres received small grants to support staff-led protection-related programmes. 10 centres, of which were given bigger grants to build safe spaces dedicated for activities and trainings for visitors, which aim to improve protection-related conditions and social cohesion for children and youth in their communities.

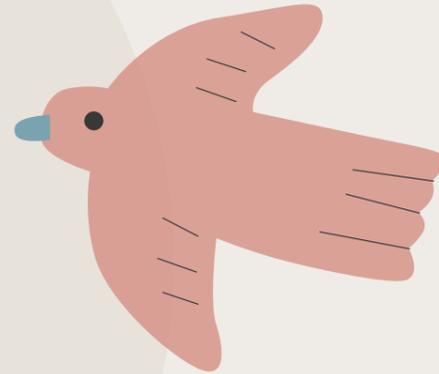
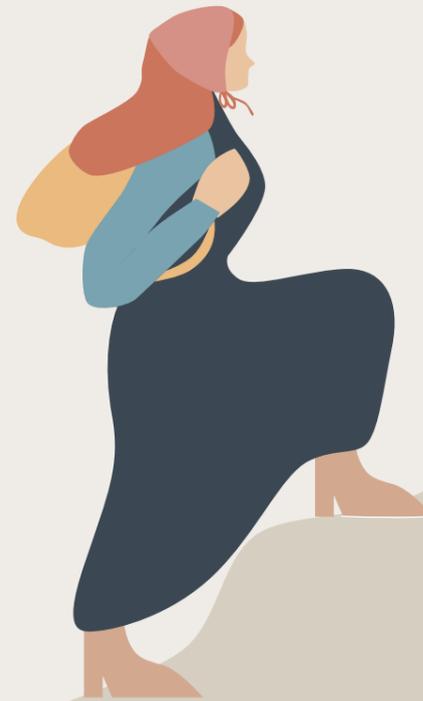


# A Mermaid Reborn

"I'm still afraid of the sound of airplanes," she says, covering her ears as an airplane flies over.

Houriye ("Mermaid" in English), is the name of this story's protagonist. She is a 23-year-old Syrian female who fled to Jordan as the war in Syria began. She was only 15 years old when she became a refugee, carrying emotional baggage and war trauma from her hometown of Homs to Al-Za'tari refugee camp, then Amman, and finally, Al-Zarqa, where she and her family settled.

Houriye never truly settled, though. With every day she spent away from her home in Syria, trying to find a new one in Jordan, she fell into deeper despair. Her post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), along with the mess and scars that war inflicted on her young soul, was not all that she had to cope with. Her greatest challenge was feeling unwelcome and unaccepted. She felt it at school, at the grocery shop, and even when walking down the street. Those feelings of alienation crippled her until she lost her will to live: "I sat in bed every night, wishing I would not wake up the next day." Getting out of bed was a battle as she dreaded the lonely days ahead. Her academic performance deteriorated as



she became more isolated. She sensed a wave of depression taking over her and could not feel anything but numbness. Despite that, she graduated from high school. However, she did not make any friends.

Her dreams of pursuing her bachelor's degree vanished with every scholarship rejection letter she received. And even though the Jordanian community and government welcomed refugees, unfortunately, Houriyeh still faced some bullying, which she endured. She always felt different while surrounded by Jordanians due to her Syrian origins. That fact exacerbated her feelings of alienation. Nevertheless, she insisted on participating in training opportunities that civil society organizations organized. But even in those trainings and at the youth centres, she felt stigmatized. She felt there was an undermining of refugees in the community that hunted her like a curse wherever she moved: "I never understood the reason behind this exclusion; my family and I are very friendly people." Despite feeling unnoticed and unwelcome, Houriyeh never gave up. She continued showing up for trainings, hoping to find her place somewhere.

It was not until she joined the "Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities" project, which Generations For Peace (GFP) implemented, that she saw the light at the end of the tunnel. During her first training, she felt relieved to find out the demographics of the trainers, facilitators, and participants: They were a mix of Syrians and Jordanians, females, and males. She grew more hopeful when she observed how the trainers and facilitators worked together as a team. The level of mutual respect restored her faith and hope that she would find herself again and feel a sense of acceptance. It ignited a spark in her that had vanished for years: "It was a long-lost dream of finding that social, creative, and life-loving girl I once was."

From the first day, she knew it was going to be a different experience. She could tell from the way the trainers were passionate not only about the topics but also about engaging the participants. It was the first time in a long time that she felt welcome.

Houriyeh's eyes tear up as she affirms, "I finally felt heard, even when I was wrong. I felt like a little kid finding home again."

In that hospitable space, Houriyeh found shelter. With the passing of each day, she became more eager to participate and let her true self unfurl. For the first time, she chose to sit at a table with Jordanians instead of searching for her Syrian peers. She regained the confidence to voice her opinion and speak in public. She felt reborn, like her soul had been pulled from the rubble of her collapsed life: "Every word the trainers said touched my heart before speaking to my mind."

After completing 36 hours of training, Houriyeh confirms that she's more confident than ever:

"I now feel confident to speak in front of a large crowd, without even having a script, and coexist within any local community."

She currently offers tutoring classes for first-grade to seventh-grade students, which enables her to generate some income. She is also a volunteer with an international NGO, where she gives life skills training. Houriyeh is adamant about developing herself and seizing every opportunity. She is currently taking English and computer skills courses. Her dream is to pursue a bachelor's degree in information technology.

# A Rural Treasure

"I was frustrated and tired from the stereotypes and stigma related to people living in rural areas," 24-year-old Mohammad, a resident of Sama Al-Sarhan village in Al-Mafraq governorate, says. He feels that residents of rural areas are perceived as being backward and primitive. This is Mohammad's impression whenever he interacts with people from the city. Despite his feelings, Mohammad has continued his involvement in volunteering to change this mindset and to reflect a positive image of his village and his people.

Driven by his will to impact his community and break stereotypes, Mohammad has been active in community service for years, seizing every available opportunity. Being athletic, he was a physical fitness trainer of youth with disabilities in his community and conducted a baseline assessment of the well-being of people with disabilities before and after his training. The negative outlook of outsiders regarding Mohammad's community was not the only thing causing his exasperation. He felt frustrated by the negativity of his fellow villagers and friends. People were stuck in a state of hopelessness. They did not believe that change was possible and belittled Mohammad's work and efforts. People always undermined his efforts and ambitions for a better future. Though he was aware that they did not have bad intentions, he could not help but feel held down by those challenges. Mohammad tried to distance himself from his community; however, he could not escape their influence. He even stopped hanging out with his friends and felt isolated at times.

"They just wanted security; I wanted to change the world," he muses.

Affected by the defeatist mindset of his community, Mohammad had low expectations when he joined the "Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities" programme that Generations For Peace (GFP) implemented. He did not think change would be possible without a positive mindset. Mohammad aimed to develop his

skills to better serve society. He grew optimistic once he met the trainers and programme staff. He was impressed by the trainers' commitment to encouraging and engaging participants. A sort of mentorship and friendship developed between Mohammad and the team of trainers: "I would finish work, grab my coffee, and head to the programme an hour earlier to chat with the trainers. Their positive energy and enthusiasm were contagious." In the programme's safe space, Mohammad found similar people with ambitions and drive who supported and inspired him.

"I joined the programme intending to gain new skills and build a network of like-minded peers, and I can assert I have accomplished this," says Mohammad. Soon enough, he felt like the programme's staff and participants were a second family to him. Mohammad enjoyed the exchange of ideas during discussions and found it eye-opening. He was especially interested in learning new advocacy skills. He had been involved in advocacy for peace training before and wanted to expand his knowledge in this area. He hoped to utilize the knowledge and skills he gained from the programme to integrate sport to solve societal problems such as violence. Ice-breaking activities were also among Mohammad's favourite activities. He thought they could pave the way for his conservative community to become more open-minded about male and female friendships.

Mohammad will always remember his trainers' constructive words and actions of encouragement: "I will never forget the moment when I was delivering a presentation during the programme and Khaled, one of the trainers, was looking at me with a gaze full of pride. I felt so proud of myself." After the presentation, the trainer told him that he had a bright future ahead of him. Those words were engraved in Mohammad's mind.

Mohammad is immensely proud of the initiative that he led during the programme. It employed sport as a tool to address mental health issues such as depression, physical wellness, and the rehabilitation of youth with drug abuse

issues. Mohammad led a team of like-minded peers. Together, they raised awareness about the problems his initiative identified, and recommended solutions based on a needs assessment survey conducted on the community level. The event he organized with the team had 70 attendees, including influential and high-profile individuals such as members of parliament, governors, presidents of civil society organizations, and representatives from the drug-control unit. "I will integrate my passion with the advocacy skills that [I] gained through the programme to expand my initiative and impact society," Mohammad states.

With passion, Mohammad continues his journey to empower people with disabilities and youth in his local community. His initiative, which he put his heart and soul into, is attracting donors' funding. He is determined to make sports a way of life in his village and a tool for the inclusion of people with disabilities and at-risk youth:

"The programme boosted my self-esteem and enabled me to network with the right individuals that inspire me to move forward with my mission to spread peace and inclusion."



# A Woman to the Rescue

Life as a refugee is a constant struggle: a struggle to find shelter, eat, provide, feel safe again, and live a decent life. Opportunities in a refugee camp are limited, and the situation does not differ much in host communities. Leaving their lives behind, refugees quite literally start from scratch. Despite the pain and agony, they find their way. Forty-four-year-old Mokhlisa is another example of refugees' strength and determination to find a bright future.

Ten years ago, Mokhlisa was forced to leave her home in Syria to escape the war. The night she and her family fled, her village was under heavy bombardment, leaving them with no option but to pursue an unknown future. Their journey to Jordan was terrifying. With four kids, they walked into the darkness in the middle of the night: "I cannot begin to describe the terror we went through that night, not to mention the physical exhaustion... When we saw the Jordanian border police, I broke down in tears, my legs collapsed, and I fell to the ground. I thanked God for [my] making it to this safe harbour with my family."

It took Mokhlisa and her family a couple of years to finally settle in Al-Ramtha city, where they currently reside. Nothing came easy in Mokhlisa's life. Her husband's heart condition worsened, and they had no source of income: "There were days when we did not have a cent in the house." Determined to



provide for her family, Mokhlisa started selling homemade pickled goods. She noticed interest from her Jordanian neighbours, and sales picked up. All she had in mind when she began was feeding her family. She had no intention of making it a business and never dared to dream that her work could expand. Seven years later, Mokhlisa became the backbone of her family, the sole provider for her son's and her daughter's families: "It's not easy but thank God I am capable of providing and being independent."

Mokhlisa first heard about the "Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities" programme that Generations For Peace (GFP) implemented through one of her friends. She joined, hoping to learn new skills that would allow her to expand her business and help the people around her.

Being the eldest in the programme did not deter Mokhlisa from engaging in the sessions and activities. She never missed a session and was attentive, taking notes of everything new: "I joined the programme with the sole purpose of learning anything that would help me grow my small business. Never have I thought the programme would give my life a new taste." Mokhlisa explains, "During the past 10 years, I forgot who I am. I was consistently worried about the future, feeding my family, and taking care of my sick husband. However, through the programme, I could, for once, disconnect from my worries and my daily responsibility, express my thoughts, and most importantly appreciate myself." The programme provided Mokhlisa with a supportive space in which to put herself first, even if it was only for a couple of hours a day. She was able to unplug and reconnect with herself. She explains,

"It felt wonderful to feel appreciated. I was immensely proud when I shared my success story with the rest of the participants. I felt fearful at first to stand and talk in public,

but once I started talking, I felt a sense of ownership and pride, and the crowd made me feel as if I was amongst my family."

Mokhlisa found the sessions on child protection eye-opening. It had never crossed her mind that she was responsible for monitoring what her kids saw on the internet. Moreover, the social media and computer training she received in the programme was very beneficial for her: "I am not saying I'm an expert now, but I can surf the web, and I can respond to requests I get on my business's Facebook page." She has passed the knowledge that she learned to her husband, who now handles her page on social media.

Today, Mokhlisa's business has reached Amman, Al-Aqaba, and other governorates. When the demand is high, she employs her Jordanian neighbours to help: "My neighbours also suffer financially, and I try to support them by asking for their assistance with work. In return, I pay for their efforts; a win-win situation." She is confident and determined to expand her business further and help her community.





## A Story of Nurture

Having previously served as a teacher in a village in Irbid, 28-year-old Balqis was very aware of school bullying and offensive language among students. However, she only understood its extent when she participated in the “Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities” programme, implemented by Generations For Peace (GFP). She was shocked to learn the actual statistics related to the spread of swear words among teenagers, especially in her town, Al-Mazar Al-Shamali. Balqis understood the urgent need to find a solution.

For Balqis, teaching was not just a job. Her students meant something; they represented the future, a chance for a better tomorrow. That was why she wanted to invest more in them. She quit her job as a teacher to escape its limitations and find space to give her students her all. She started tutoring students at home. Her business grew, and more students flooded it. Eventually, she rented a place and hired three other teachers to respond to the increase in demand. Balqis wanted to develop her students not only on an academic level; she aimed to make them better individuals.

To serve her students better, she joined GFP’s programme. Balqis wanted to find a way to address the problem of violence and bullying. She was primarily interested in youth engagement, child protection, and eradicating violent language in schools and among youth in the streets. The programme’s trainers spoke a language that resonated with her when they tackled this issue. Like her, they emphasized that youth were not a problem to be solved; they were agents of change capable of leading and sustaining positive social change. Very few understood this, and Balqis was thrilled to find people who shared such ideologies. She realized that youth mostly used expletives as a coping mechanism out of ignorance and simply because they were copying each other.

During the programme, Balqis learned how to address the problem of foul language and bullying among youth. She enjoyed discussions around those topics and found it enlightening to hear the differing points of views regarding youth’s violent language. Balqis says,

"Youth should never be blamed for their behaviours. Rather, it is the society's lack of guidance and mentoring that throws them into deviant behaviour."

She goes on to explain, “Throughout the various sessions in the programme, we learned different communication, negotiation, and mobilization techniques that I found extremely valuable in reaching out to my students.” She was keen on changing their behaviour and their language through dialogue.

Balqis adds, “Throughout the programme, we understood that behavioural change needed incentives. That’s why I started an initiative to encourage my students to refrain from using violent language.” Her initiative aimed to implement the values of social cohesion by providing used clothes to the less fortunate. Each week, she would choose one student to help her distribute the clothes to the less fortunate. “I was amazed to see the change in my students’ attitudes and language. I even noticed it in the street around my tutoring centre.”

Balqis continued to employ the knowledge she had gained in communication with her students. She also transferred what she had learned to parents whenever she got the chance, hoping to cascade the impact. “I talked with my students about accepting the opinions of others and used it as a tool to eliminate bullying,” she says. Balqis realized that youth had too much energy and time, which needed to be filled with constructive activities to solve the problem. She started offering extracurricular sessions on public speaking and communication skills and painting activities.

Balqis joined the programme to deliver better as a tutor; however, she gained so much more:

"Even though I coexist with Syrians that have become part of my society, I never really comprehended the depth of their suffering and how challenging their lives are. I saw the world from a different lens."

Balqis found it enlightening to hear about her village residents’ different challenges: “It was the most beautiful thing to see how participants in the programme tried to find ways to help one another and collaborate.” She had offered one of the Syrian participants a job as an English tutor.

Currently, Balqis is working relentlessly on expanding her business and reaching more students. She has incorporated various extracurricular sessions in her centre for youth to engage in during their spare time: “I transferred the knowledge I gained from the programme to my students, and hopefully, my students will carry it forward to their families and friends.”



# The Wind of Change

Ola was only twelve when she fled Syria and came to Jordan. From that day forward, nothing came easy to her; in fact, some things never came. Life was all about adapting to her new life in Jordan, which she was never good at. She had always feared change. Ola found comfort in the constant; she held on to things, places, and all that was familiar. For that reason, she had suffered tremendously since leaving her home in Syria.

Fitting in at school was a struggle. Ola always felt like a stranger although most of her peers treated her nicely. Being bullied exacerbated the situation. Even though only a few girls did it, it took a toll on her personality and academic performance. She also struggled to adapt to the teaching style of her teachers: “Being an ‘A’ student at home and finding myself in a situation where I can’t perform like I used to or be who I am, devastated me. It was a daily struggle. Every night, I would decide to drop out of school, only to change my mind the next morning.” Ola never quit; she showed up for herself every day despite the bullying, fear, and confusion.

Determined to become a pharmacist, Ola rode the waves of her ambition and chose the scientific stream at school. However, her parents could not afford the associated expenses, and eventually, she had to switch to the art stream. Despite being devastated to give up on her dream, Ola was insistent on pursuing her higher education. She graduated from high school with a high score and was granted a scholarship to study at Al-Zarqa University: “No words can describe how happy I was when I received the scholarship.”

Seeking opportunities to grow and learn, Ola joined the “Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities”



programme implemented by Generations For Peace (GFP): “I joined, hoping to make new friends and learn something new. I never expected that the programme would leave such an influence on me.” She explains that she was intrigued by the sessions that focused on accepting change and adaptability:

“Those sessions resonated strongly with me given my struggle with accepting change and letting go. It was like trainers were speaking to my deepest fears.” Ola felt comfortable sharing her story and expressing her thoughts: “It was a judgment-free zone. I felt heard and supported, even when my thoughts sounded trivial to me.”

She says, “The idea was eye-opening. I never thought how exhausting it is to hold on to things and how liberating letting go of the past is and just accepting my present. I’ve held on to things my whole life, even when I was lucky enough to be granted a scholarship in interior design, I clung to my dream of becoming a pharmacist.” Ola is still learning to adjust her mindset in order to see change as a positive thing, a blessing in disguise.

Accepting change was not the only challenge that Ola wanted to overcome. After joining university, she realized how much public speaking made her nervous. She worked to improve on that throughout the programme: “I became more comfortable when I presented in front of the participants.” Ola explains that this was reflected in the university context, where she was more confident about speaking in a public setting: “Most importantly, the programme has offered me a new perspective to see change as an opportunity and to be open to new experiences.”



## Like a Phoenix

Like a phoenix, she rose again from the ashes of her destroyed life. Amnah, a 32-year-old lady, decided to conquer her fears, face her demons, and start all over again as a refugee in Jordan.

Amnah led a peaceful and successful life prior to the war in her country, Syria. She was a student who performed with distinction, always at the top of her class and above her peers. However, the war halted this life and her educational path; she could not return to school for two years.

Her name, which translates to “believer” in English, matches her spirit. She was a believer in God, herself, and her potential. She never lost faith in herself despite the agony and the hardship. Along with her family, she moved to Jordan in 2013. They stayed in an orphanage until they finally settled in Al-Zarqa: “At this point, it hit me; this is my new life and reality. I must accept it, deal with it, and get back on my feet.” It was not easy for Amnah, but she knew she had no choice.



After getting back to school, Amnah stood out again. Despite the difficult circumstances she had been through, she ranked 10th in her high school exam results in her school and in Al- Russiefa area. She received a scholarship from Al-Zarqa University, where she studied languages and translation. Today, Amnah is fluent in English even though she used to struggle with it in Syria, where it was not part of her curriculum.

Despite feeling proud of herself, Amnah was very conscious of the mental and social effects of the war on her and other children and teenagers. Her father had been killed a couple of months before she moved to Jordan. That had been a breaking point in her life: “There are no words to describe the pain and agony I went through. I still hear his voice saying my name and see his face printed in my memory; he is with me in every second and wherever I go...

**"When we left Syria, my entire world crumbled before me."**

This abrupt change severely influenced Amnah's personality and her ability to blend into her new surroundings in Jordan.

Determined to move on and not give up, Amnah joined the “Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities” programme, which Generations For Peace implemented. The programme ran through October 2021 and included advocacy sessions for youth. It comprised 12 sessions with 30 participants, including Jordanian youth and Syrian refugees, aiming to promote social cohesion and protection.

**"Throughout the sessions, I was able to find my voice again and regain my self-esteem. Most importantly, I felt safe. A feeling of belonging grew within me with each session, and I felt I was part of the Jordanian community as well as the Syrian [one]," she says.**

Amnah adds, “I feel immensely proud of myself for achieving what I accomplished. Participating in the programme's advocacy sessions filled me with happiness and made me realize the importance of voicing out and expressing my opinion. I also realized how important it is to network and step out of my comfort zone by giving those who are not like me a chance.” She developed many friendships that she cherishes until this day.

Amnah will soon graduate with a bachelor's degree and fluency in English. She is ready to conquer what life throws at her, for she has overcome the impossible. She is resilient, excited for her future, and more confident than ever: “I was able to overcome the social anxiety that the war inflicted on me, and now more than ever, I am ready to pursue opportunities to help me grow.” Just like a phoenix, Amnah is ready to spread her wings and fly again.



## A Battle from Within

She thought that escaping the deadly war in Syria alone with her six-month-old daughter would be the most horrifying experience of her life. Little did she know that she would have to face a battle at home with her husband, who she thought was the closest person to her.

The story of 30-year-old Zahra began when she fled Syria with her newborn. A couple of months later, she reunited with her husband and settled in Al-Zarqa. The future filled her with fear and anxiety, while the present was paved with feelings of alienation and homesickness. She was thrilled when she was hired as a salesperson at a clothes shop. Her feelings of contentment did not last for long once she realized that as a refugee, she was the subject of pity: "I was offered money and help from customers so many times, and though it probably stemmed from good intentions, I could not stand it." Filled with pride, Zahra quit her job.

With two more children and dire economic circumstances, her husband

struggled to maintain a steady job. He had to bend over backwards to provide for the family. He started being aggressive and violent with her. Zahra was terrified of him; she could not find the voice to fight back. Drowning in fear, she felt more paralyzed every time he became more violent. Her bruises went beyond her physical body: "I felt broken, my soul was crushed. I was barely managing to rebuild what the war has destroyed in me, only to find myself stuck in a vicious cycle of violence."

At home, the violence worsened. Like a raging tornado, it engulfed everything and left nothing but destruction. One day, in the aftermath of her husband's episodes of anger, Zahra realized that she had had enough. Just like that, she found the courage to file a report against him. An international organization identified her domestic violence case as stage four, meaning her life was at risk.

Zahra and her kids went into therapy for eight months. She was able



to stop the physical domestic violence. However, she was still terrified of her husband as he continued to be verbally aggressive. Zahra collected the shattered pieces of herself and decided to move on despite her struggles. Volunteering was her haven. She attended every awareness session or workshop that NGOs and CSOs organized. Gender-based violence and protection were discussed in some sessions, which gave her hope for a solution to her desperate reality. One door opened another, and she finally became a volunteer trainer with the “Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities” programme, which Generations For Peace (GFP) implemented.

Zahra describes the programme as a turning point in her life:  
"As a survivor of abuse, violence was a sensitive topic for me. At first, my face turned red, my voice was shaky, and my stomach clenched every time I discussed it. However, with time, my confidence grew, and I was able to reflect on my experience."

Discussing violence while her home was not a safe place made Zahra realize that she had to put an end to all the forms of violence at home: “The safe space and support that I found in the programme gave me faith and confidence in myself and my capabilities. I was finally able to find my voice and stand in the face of violence.” Zahra explains that once she stood up for herself, she deterred her husband from raising his voice or laying a hand on her again: “I was so passionate about the topic. I wanted to raise awareness so that no woman would ever have to endure what I went through.”

Zahra finally felt powerful after feeling helpless for so long. It was her time to blossom. She was immensely touched by one of the Syrian participants who was still traumatized by the war in Syria. She had severe anxiety and could not

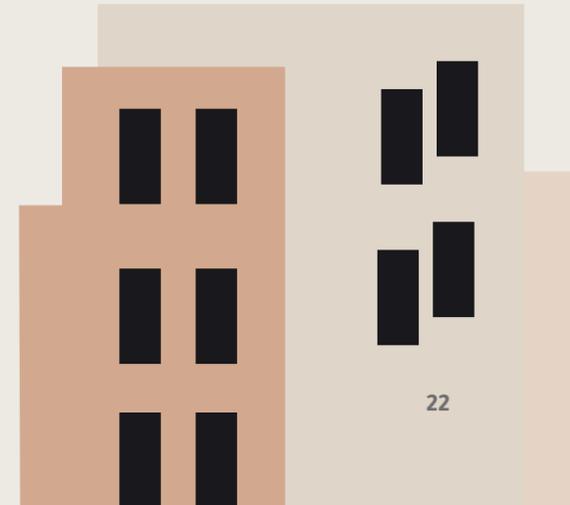
socialize with Jordanians or males in general. Zahra made sure to get her to engage her in every activity and let her mingle with Jordanians and particularly males. She observed as the participant’s personality and attitude changed: “She became one of the most active participants. I always thought I was weak, but here I was helping someone and giving her strength.”

Zahra was able to break barriers between Syrians and Jordanians:

"After all those years I spent in Jordan, I only made Jordanian friends during the programme. It was heart-warming to see people breaking preconceived judgments."

Today, Zahra is more confident as a mother, a wife, and a trainer. She has gained the right set of skills to stand out in her field. Her passion for protection and ending violence maximized her employability. She was headhunted by an international NGO after one of her sessions with the programme and was also selected by another NGO as a volunteer trainer on gender-based violence. Zahra is confident that there is no battle that she cannot conquer.

*Disclaimer: The real name of this story's character has been changed for privacy reasons.*



# From Engineering to Child Protection

In the absence of the moon and in utter darkness, 22-year-old Wisam plunged into the unknown for a chance of survival. He fled Syria with a group of terrified mothers and children. He witnessed terrified mothers holding tightly on to their infants, wishing they could return them into their wombs to protect them from the dreadful journey. Their escape was not far from a horror movie:

"They were shooting at us, people dropped dead, and I could do nothing but pray to God [that] we [would] reach Jordan in one piece."

Once in Jordan, Wisam struggled to find shelter. He finally settled in Irbid. He says, "I thought it would be a matter of months until we return back home again." However, things were very different. He tried to make sense of how his life had flipped around. His reality lay heavy on him. At 22, Wisam found himself alone in a foreign country with no clear future or glimpse of hope. Prior to coming to Jordan, Wisam had been pursuing a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. Then the war had paralyzed his life. Like many other refugees, he had to forget about his education and make a living. Life taught him to toughen up.

After struggling to find a job, he worked night shifts at a restaurant, from 4:00 pm till 1:00 am. Wisam never gave up on his dream of becoming a civil engineer. He saved every penny and worked extra hours at night to fund his education: "It was very difficult, but I had a clear goal in front of me and was planning to graduate from my own sweat without the help of anyone." He enrolled in Jerash University and graduated after completing the remaining three years. His

dream of practicing engineering did not see the light of the day as he realized that Syrians were not permitted to work in the field due to the shortage of opportunities for Jordanians: "I knew I had to get this idea out of my mind." Wisam's harsh reality helped to mould his personality. He decided to focus on volunteering to develop himself in the hope that it would take him to better places. In 2014, his journey in volunteering kicked off, and indeed, it opened the door to new opportunities. His first volunteering opportunity revolved around child protection: "I had no clue what child protection meant. I was an engineer; I only understood equations and numbers. But here I was dealing with children and learning about child protection." His interest in protection issues grew:

"I loved doing something for a higher purpose; it was as if I found my calling in life and wanted to learn more about child protection."

Eager to learn and expand his knowledge, Wisam read books and NGO-developed booklets on child protection. He also watched online videos on how to become a trainer. His passion manifested into a clear vision that pushed him forward.

Wisam continued volunteering in protection-related opportunities. He joined the "Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities" programme, which Generations For Peace implemented. The programme focused on protection and gender-based violence. He was a keen learner and was excited to expand his knowledge of these issues.

After receiving training for three months that incorporated Advocacy for Peace, conducting a community needs assessment process, and topics on protection, Wisam was motivated to pass on his knowledge to the participants. He says, "With the knowledge I gained and my enhanced capabilities, I felt empowered to empower."

Once Wisam started training youth in his community, he noticed the interest of the participants: "The participants were very engaged. Some males were reluctant to participate at first, but as we delved deeper into the topics, they became more attentive." Wisam noticed how living in a conservative society impacted the participants: "At the beginning, males and females sat separately in two groups. They were shy and hesitant to debate together."

Wisam worked on breaking those barriers and enhancing engagement between Syrians and Jordanians to promote more social cohesion. He states, "I was delighted to see the transition in attitudes between the participants and seeing them build friendships with one another." Wisam adds,

"On a personal level, this programme truly boosted my self-esteem, I never thought I would be able to facilitate sessions and speak in public in front of 70 people, including people of high [profile] such as [members of parliament], and to discuss such sensitive and serious topics. It also changed the way I deal with my kids and converse with my wife; all in all, it made me a better person."

On a professional level, Wisam believes the programme increased his employability and empowered him with the right set of skills and knowledge. After the programme, an international NGO hired Wisam, and he credits the programme with this.





## When Passion & Knowledge Meet

“I believe in the refugees’ right to shelter, safety, and to be independent; for that reason, I participated in the programme that is implemented by Generations For Peace,” says Ahmad from Al-Blaqa, 35, a core team member in the programme, “Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities”. He trained 32 participants from the Ministry of Youth (MoY) on issues of protection concerning refugees and host community members. Those participants were presidents of youth centres under the umbrella of the MoY.

Believing in equality for all, regardless of gender or ethnicity, Ahmad asserts that refugees should be granted the right to return, if possible, and host communities should foster social cohesion to enable refugees to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging. He asserts, “The programme’s aim is very strategic, noble, and much needed.” Jordan is considered to be the second-largest host country for refugees per capita, with more than 650,000 Syrian refugees.

With a bachelor’s degree in counselling and mental health and driven by his passion to impact youth, Ahmad has always been interested in protection issues and has tried to expand his knowledge in these areas. When he joined the programme as a core team member, he was a keen learner. Ahmad was enthusiastic about the knowledge he would gain during his training and the opportunity to transfer it: “I gained the right set of skills that I believe made me a better trainer. On the other hand, the topics that we delved into are crucial to our society and should be taught even in schools.”

Over the course of the training, Ahmad covered topics such as child protection, gender-based violence (GBV), and child labour:

"Even though I am familiar with these topics, learning the right procedures and methods to handle cases of domestic violence and GBV [was] very beneficial and crucial. We also learned how to identify such cases and the tactics to handle and evaluate each case differently."

Ahmad explains that those skills are vital for people working with youth, especially in a conservative society where domestic violence is treated as a family issue, not as a social problem.

To implement a road map on the correct referral mechanism for all youth centres’ supervisors and managers, Ahmad mapped all the institutions in Al-Balqa that provided services for youth. Those services included psychological counselling, aid, legal consultations, and safety concerns. The mapping covered 50 institutions and was meant to serve as a guideline for referral services for youth in a wide range of thematic areas. He is also proud that a child protection curriculum has been incorporated in all the youth centres in Al-Balqa and the Ministry of Youth staff members have been trained in it.

Ahmad reflects, “I did not expect to witness this change in the participants’ mindset and attitudes towards referral mechanisms and the importance of working collectively with local institutions so that each case can be handled professionally.” During the training, Ahmad noticed high interest from the participants. With each session, they felt more comfortable asking questions, suggesting case studies, and expressing their opinions. He explains, “I realized that the participants lack a deep understanding of the concept of protection. This programme was eye-opening for many, including myself.”

Ahmad believes in the importance of raising awareness about protection issues:

"The programme was highly informative and [educational], and I will put effort into passing on the knowledge I learned [to] more of my colleagues and parents in my area to raise a generation of children and teenagers that are tolerant, accepting, and comfortable in their own skin."

# The Rose of the Desert

"I never thought I would be trained with this level of professionalism on how to deal with cases of domestic violence and gender-based violence," shares Aws, 30, a core team member from the Ministry of Youth (MoY) in Generation For Peace's programme, "Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities". Aws is the Head of Al-Petra Youth Centre. He has a bachelor's degree in physical education and an MBA. Moreover, his passion for youth empowerment led him to his current position.

Aws was selected among 24 others as a core team member based on his experience with youth and his dedication to empowerment. He says, "We took an intensive training for five days on protection issues such as child protection, child labour, gender-based violence (GBV) and were trained on how to handle such cases. As the manager of a youth centre, being confronted with such cases is not a rare thing, and learning the professional referral mechanisms is extremely valuable to me." The training also incorporated children's rights in Jordanian law and exposure to laws and legislation related to children and women's protection, which many are not familiar with. Aws explains, "The topics covered and the way they were delivered were very educational, engaging, and beneficial for those of us who work with youth" When he completed the training, he felt confident of his training skills and acquired knowledge and was ready to pass them on to his fellows and colleagues.

Once it was Aws's turn to train, he trained 25 of his colleagues from the MoY. Although half of the training was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he found ways to make it as engaging as the half that was held in person. He says, "One of the activities that were of value and triggered engagement was when I asked the participants to come up with helping mechanisms for victims of domestic violence and the advantages and disadvantages of each suggestion." Amongst the suggestions were a hotline, a designated email address to handle the relevant cases, and boxes that would be placed at youth centres and mosques for youth to drop their problems in for handling with utter secrecy.

Aws also hosted a counselling and mental health graduate from the local community who answered various questions related to the effects of protection and a safe environment on youth and women versus the effects of any sort of abuse. He remembers, "The participants were very interested in the information that he introduced, and some even took his number for further inquiries."

Aws continues, "I was aware of the sensitivity of the topics we were delivering, especially in our conservative and protective society. That is why I was cautious in how I introduced ideas, without provoking or offending anyone." Aws believes that in conservative communities such as his, it is crucial to raise awareness about protection issues and break the stigma.

Due to his belief in the importance of raising awareness about child protection, Aws has incorporated protection topics in the Al-Petra Youth Centre's yearly plan. The plan includes monthly awareness sessions on different topics, including child protection, early marriage, women in Islam, and child abuse.



# Knowledge is Power

When Arwa was selected to be a core team member in the “Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities” programme, she was thrilled and anxious at the same time. Although she had previously been a trainer with other programmes, she dreaded the idea of training her colleagues from the Ministry of Youth (MoY) given that she was the youngest. At 28, Arwa felt she had been granted an opportunity to challenge herself and step out of her comfort zone. Despite her fear, she knew that it was a chance to evolve.

Arwa had no previous knowledge of protection issues. She was not so naïve as to think we lived in a utopian city where atrocities did not exist, but she had never viewed protection issues as urgent or as a priority to be addressed. She did not understand the urgency of what lay under its umbrella.



The programme’s training consisted of five intensive days on protection concepts. It delved into child protection in depth, covering child labour, what was identified as abuse, related laws and legislations, and referral procedures. It also addressed gender-based violence (GBV). Arwa remembers, “I didn’t understand the meaning of protection at first, I thought our culture was a safe one. I felt enlightened to learn about protection issues and their different dimensions. Day by day, I developed a greater interest and was keen to learn more.” She never missed a day of training and was very attentive.

**“I realized child protection is a holistic concept. It involves society as a whole and should not be limited to parents and families,” says Arwa.**

With that mindset, she felt a sense of ownership and responsibility for raising awareness about child protection and GBV: “I felt I was in the right place at the right time. I was empowered with knowledge that I wanted to share [with others], starting with my colleagues.” Arwa felt ready to move into the second phase of the programme and to start training her colleagues from the MoY.

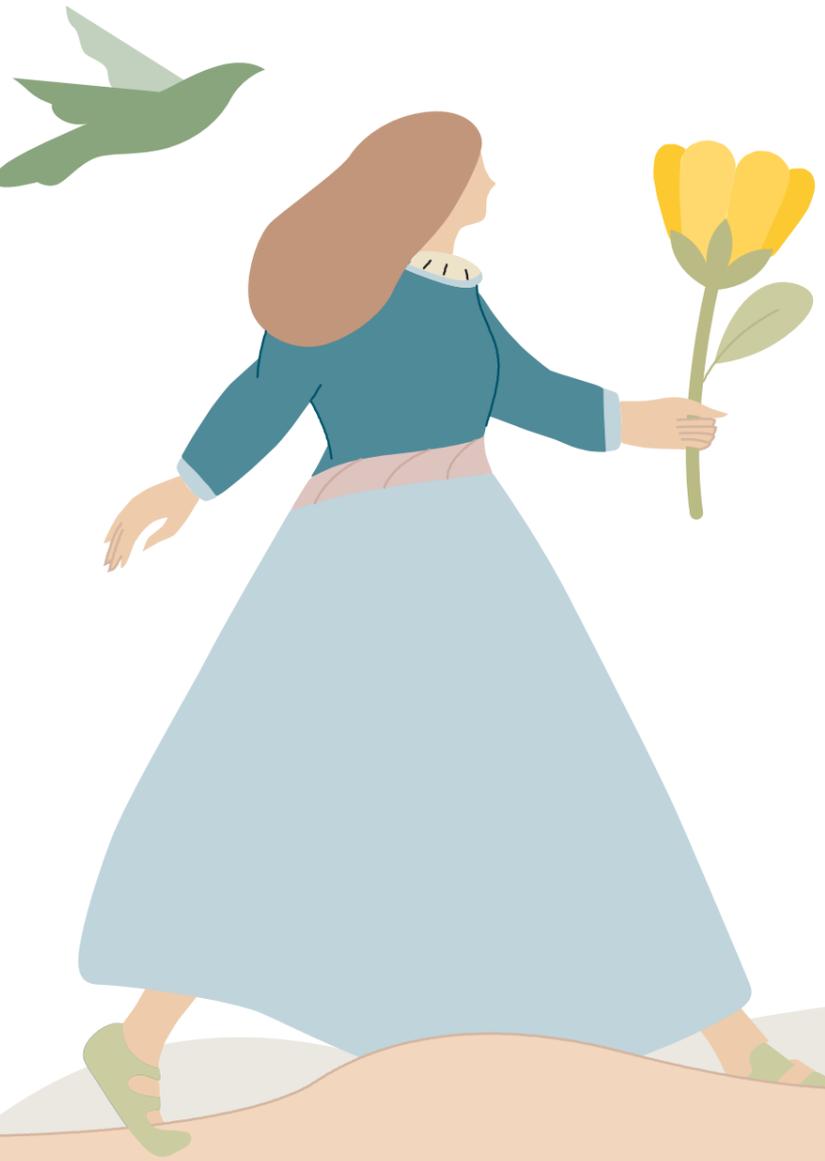
At the beginning of the training, there was some resistance from the participants. Many did not see the point of learning about protection issues: “You want to teach us how to take care of our kids?” some participants would say. Arwa knew that she needed to have patience as she was sure their attitudes came from ignorance about the true meaning of protection.

The training covered eight days and involved 35 participants. Arwa noticed changes in their attitudes from the second and third days. Those participants who had been sceptical at first started suggesting hypothetical cases and asking how to deal with them if they occurred. Others mentioned examples of child abuse cases that they knew existed. With passion and determination, Arwa delivered the training and encouraged the participants to report cases

of child abuse using the right procedure. Building on the positive feedback of the participants and the programme’s impact, the MoY is developing a child protection programme to be implemented in youth centres across the Kingdom.

**Arwa remembers, “The most important thing that the participants and I learned was that the Jordanian law protects children and reporters of child abuse. It is vital that society is aware of such laws and children are taught their rights. This is where the value of this programme lies.”**

On a personal level, Arwa gained expertise in protection issues and elevated her skills as a trainer: “I now understand the importance and urgency of child protection and aim to raise awareness about it.” She was asked to deliver workshops and awareness sessions for women from host communities at multiple youth centres in Al-Mafraq. In the bigger picture, Arwa believes that enlightening one individual with knowledge can lead to a multiplied impact and, eventually, an educated society with no tolerance for abuse or violence in any form.



## An Expert-to-Be

Coming from Al-Ghuweir village in Al-Karak, Iman was well aware of the issues that impeded her village. The rigid tribal structure that governed the area was just one of many; however, this problem had severe consequences for women and children. Women and children would have to be displaced for days and sometimes weeks as a method of protection until tribal law resolved matters. This disrupted women's normal lives, forcing them to miss work and straining their mental health. Iman, who is very invested in enhancing women's and children's lives, puts all her effort into raising awareness about protection issues and improving her society.

At 43, Iman works as the head of Al-Ghuweir Youth Centre and is an employee with the Ministry of Youth (MoY). She has always been interested in child protection and has participated in several workshops on the topic and volunteered

as a trainer with a number of non-governmental organizations. She states, "As someone who works very closely with youth, I come across so many stories and protection cases, whether for children, teenagers, or women." People have often consulted Iman on how to deal with their kids and protect them. That is where her interest in and passion for protection stem from:

"I developed a sense of duty towards my community to improve it and better protect women and children."

It was no shock for Iman when she learned that the Generations For Peace protection programme that trained trainers on protection issues and concepts had selected her. The programme, "Improving Protection Spaces and Practices (IPSP) for Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities", aims to raise awareness about protection issues, provide a safe space for youth, and foster social cohesion between Syrian refugees and their host communities. Iman was trained intensively for five days to prepare her to train her peers from the MoY. She reflects on the experience:

"Despite my understanding, experience, and familiarity with protection concepts and the reality on the ground, I gained so much knowledge on how to deal with cases professionally and how to raise awareness while being culturally sensitive"

While learning about children's rights, Iman found it very interesting that children should be granted the space to make decisions, a simple yet significant right that had never crossed her mind: "I started teaching my colleagues about giving children and teenagers space to be who they are and express themselves. I talked to mothers about giving their kids the right to choose their outfits, which in turn enhances their self-esteem and teaches them to trust themselves and eventually trust their gut feeling when they are feeling unsafe." Iman believes that little things like those make a difference in a child's development.



She knows there is much work to be done in her community. However, this programme has given her hope for a better future by showing her the engagement level of the participants: They were keen to learn and to change. The sessions would usually run two to three hours longer than scheduled to allow time for responses to questions and the wrapping up of discussions.

“I tried to make the training as inclusive as possible to provide a holistic understanding of the meaning of protection. I covered different topics within protection and gave examples, from the simplest to the most complicated,” says Iman. She raised awareness of the trainer’s body language with the participants. Given that they would be dealing with teenagers and children, she believed it was crucial that they avoid touching or hugging a child unless the child gave consent.

To promote social cohesion with refugees in the host community, Iman implemented an exercise that she describes as “powerful in shifting perspective”. The activity asked participants to put themselves in a refugee’s shoes and write down the challenges they faced before being displaced, while seeking asylum in another country, after settling in, and even when they returned home.

She recalls, “I would feel the energy of the participants change and their tone [become] more sympathetic and understanding when discussing the problems. This fosters social cohesion and protection for Syrian refugees and reduces feelings of resentment that are a result of a misunderstanding. I am more than grateful to have been part of this programme, which enhanced my skills and understanding as a trainer,” says Iman. She is keen on expanding her knowledge, hoping that one day she will become a certified child protection expert:

"I am filled with faith and hope for a brighter future with educated parents and a protective society."





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