Yazda, in partnership with IOM and funded by USAID, has been working with Survivors of genocide living in northern Iraq and the Sinjar area through the provision of protection services, capacity building for a Yazidi Survivors Network, and awareness and advocacy through the “Nobody’s Listening” virtual reality experience. One of the main focuses of this project has been the protection programming which, to date, has supported over 200 Survivors of genocide, mass atrocities, and human rights violations in Iraq, currently living in the Sinuni and Sinjar Sub-Districts.

Through this programming, Yazda provides a multi-faceted, community-based protection approach offering case management, individual and group mental health and psychological support (MHPSS) sessions, legal documentation and counseling services and emergency cash support. Between November 2021 and June 2022, Yazda has achieved the following under this programming:

- Supported a total of 209 (149 women, 25 girls, 17 boys, 18 men) individual Survivors through this program.
- Held 19 specialized legal awareness sessions covering the Yazidi Survivors Law, electronic blackmail, fingerprint identification, birth certificate requirements, compensation claims and parental proof, among other topics.
- Provided legal support, including documentation, representation and legal advocacy for 130 individual Survivors.
- Organized 84 group psychosocial support (PSS) sessions across Sinjar and Sinuni to provide a supportive environment for Survivors to share their experience and learn psychological coping mechanisms.
- Distributed food, non-food items, hygiene kits and cash support to over 200 Survivors and their families. This support is provided to those living below the poverty line and suffering from a lack of basic services and household income.
- Provided reimbursement for specialist medical support to 75 Survivors who sustained significant injuries and illnesses as a result of their time in ISIL captivity.
- Supplied clothing to 26 Survivors who did not have adequate and weather-appropriate clothing items.
MHPSS

Survivors receive regular individual PSS sessions to deal with the on-going trauma associated with ISIL captivity, which is coupled with weekly group PSS sessions. These sessions are designed to focus on common issues including feelings of anger and guilt, relaxation methodologies and coping with trauma and loss. They also serve to build a support network where Survivors can learn from and connect with others who have similar lived experiences.

Testimonials:

“Four of my brothers have been missing since ISIL attacked us in 2014, and I find it very difficult to cope with what happened, as I feel isolated and sad. These sessions have changed my life and made me feel stronger and more optimistic.” - Female Survivor, 32 years old, Tel Qasab Village.

“Before these sessions on anger management, I noticed that I couldn’t control my temper, and it was impacting my children. These sessions have taught me how to regulate my behaviour and deal with my anger in a more productive way that doesn’t hurt my kids.” - Female Survivor, 29 years old, Sinjar City.

“These sessions are so beneficial for all of us Survivors, and I hope that Yazda can provide more to support to all of us to help us adapt to difficult situations without being impacted by our trauma.” - Female Survivor, 45 years old, Sinuni City.

LEGAL SUPPORT

Survivors are also supported with legal assistance through the provision of legal consultation and documentation support. The majority of Survivors lost their official documentation during the ISIL crisis and, without it, have difficulty obtaining services and support for themselves and their family. Many also require support in establishing compensation and support claims, a lengthy and expensive process. The Yazda Legal Team coordinates with legal and governmental departments to support Survivors in obtaining these documents and provide the legal representation they need to seek legal compensation. The team also provides weekly legal information sessions in order to equip Survivors with knowledge of their legal rights in matters of family law, legal documentation requirements, and housing, land, and property laws.

EMERGENCY CASH AND MATERIAL SUPPORT

Not only are many Survivors suffering from psychological wounds, they are also dealing with many physical wounds and medical conditions, all compounded by extreme poverty. To help alleviate this and contribute to holistic recovery and healing, Survivors are provided emergency cash support to assist with meeting emergency medical needs - such as surgery and specialist appointments - and the purchase of new season-appropriate clothing. Yazda also provides food and non-food item kits toward providing relief to Survivors and their immediate family members.

SUCCESS STORIES

LENA, 62 YEARS OLD, KARDASIAH NEIGHBOURHOOD, SINJAR CITY

Lena is a Yazidi survivor who was liberated from ISIL captivity four years ago. When ISIL attacked Sinjar on the third of August 2014, she and her family tried in vain to flee. Though her son managed to get away, the rest of the family was captured and held in captivity for four years, stripped of their basic human rights and forced to endure daily abuse and deprivation. She and her family members were bought and sold as objects for ISIL fighters, trafficked between Tel Afar and Mosul, and ultimately brought to Syria. Eventually, Lena and some of her family were able to escape from ISIL captivity.
Overview of Yazda Protection Programming Under USAID-Funded Project

through a smuggler. For the next two years, she lived in an IDP camp in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In 2020, she and her family returned to their homeland. Although she was thankful to be back in her village, the horrors of the 2014 ISIL invasion were ever present in her mind. She and her family lacked civil documentation – preventing them from accessing basic services – and sufficient livelihood opportunities to support themselves.

Lena enrolled in Yazda’s protection program and was immediately referred to the legal department, which supported her to access her rights through securing civil documentation and filing a compensation case, and survivor’s rights claims in conjunction with the relevant government directorates. She was also provided with emergency cash support, hygiene kits, and a monthly food basket. To bolster her ability to address her ongoing issues with fear, anxiety and trauma, she was also provided with professional mental health support through group and individual PSS sessions.

Through a combination of material, cash and legal support, Lena and her family were better able to manage the stressors of returning to Sinjar. This helped to create space for her to focus on her own mental health and wellbeing, with the support of the PSS sessions. Lena reported that her daily life and that of her family was the best it had been since 2014 and that she finally felt as if she was recovering from her trauma.

Amsha was captured from her village alongside her whole immediate family by ISIL in 2014. She was held in captivity in Raqqa, Syria for just over three years, where she was subjected to unimaginable torture and made to witness the disturbing reality of ISIL’s occupation from within the organization’s capital. She, her sister, and mother were enslaved by their captors and forced to renounce their religion and live according to ISIL’s interpretation of Islam. The fate of Amsha’s father is still unknown to this day. After their liberation, the remaining family returned to Sinuni. There, Amsha’s mother worked to support them until she was killed in a car accident, leaving Amsha and her sister to be cared for by their elderly grandparents. This immense loss only compounded the severe trauma already experienced by Amsha and her sister.

Amsha was connected to Yazda’s Case Management Team, which – in partnership with IOM, funded by USAID, and under Yazda’s protection programming in Sinjar – began supporting her to address the PTSD, nightmares, sleeping difficulties, and other psychological issues she developed as a result of her traumatic experiences. Amsha was provided with a series of individually-tailored PSS sessions to help her work through her trauma and build coping strategies. She and her sister were also provided with food and non-food items, hygiene kits and clothing. This was supplemented by legal aid: the Yazda lawyer has been working with Amsha and her grandparents in support of her claim for compensation as an ISIL survivor, also providing her with legal documentation enabling her increased access to services and hopefully result in her receiving reparations in the future. Today, Amsha has shown a marked improvement in her overall psychological condition and has been able to return to school and make new friends. Although her healing is an ongoing process, she feels that Yazda’s continuing support has made a her feel much better in her life and she is no longer afraid to fall asleep at night.
SAAD, 19 YEARS OLD, SABAHIYA VILLAGE, SINJAR DISTRICT

Tending to his family’s sheep, Saad was just 11 years old when ISIL attacked his village. Although they attempted to escape, all 7 of his family members were kidnapped, brought to Tel Afar and enslaved. During this time, they experienced torture, deprivation of basic needs and human rights, and forced denunciation of their religion. After a year in captivity, Saad managed to escape to Mamlyan Camp in Duhok Governorate. Due to difficult living conditions in the camp, his family chose to return to Sinjar in 2018 to rebuild their lives in their homeland.

As a result of his time in ISIL captivity, Saad experienced severe symptoms related to his trauma, including flashbacks, nightmares, fear, anxiety and depression. Although he was happy to be home, it was difficult for him to return to his old life. After meeting with the Yazda Team, he was immediately enrolled in the project providing individual MHPSS sessions in order to help treat his psychological symptoms. His case manager provided him with useful techniques and exercises to help process his feelings and experiences and adapt to his new life.

Saad was also missing all of his legal documents, which meant that he could neither access any basic services nor move freely throughout the area. The Legal Team issued him all the relevant personal documents he needed, which helped him to reduce his stress and access the services and support he needs. This combination of MHPSS and legal assistance has made a difference: Saad expressed that he has found hope and is feeling more positive about his future.