



Israeli Charity Saving Iraqi Children One Heart at a Time

Save a Child's Heart Gives Life to Children From Iraq and Around the World

By SIMON MCGREGOR-WOOD

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The car pulled up outside the Wolfson Hospital in Israel and three Iraqi children and their mothers got out. They are a long way from home, here in Israel to have lifesaving heart surgery organized by an Israeli charity called Save a Child's Heart.

Iraqi children have been coming to Israel for heart operations for 2½ years. The lives of 40 children have been saved so far. Save a Child's Heart (www.saveachildsheart.org) has been operating for more than 10 years bringing children to Israel from all over the world including from the Palestinian territories.

Simon Fisher is the charity's executive director and explained the guiding principles behind the organization's work. "A child is a child regardless of where a child comes from. Regardless of his color, nationality, ethnicity, every child deserves the best medical care," he said.

Inside the crowded hospital it is clear that the new Iraqi guests are nervous about their new surroundings. This is after all Israel, an enemy state with no diplomatic relations with Iraq. Fisher says suspicion soon disappears. "This fear, when they see how their children are treated by the medical team, transpires into a completely different relationship."

Among the new arrivals we met was 2-year-old Dalal Jamil from northern Iraq. His mother, Ghulzar, is carrying him into a room filled with monitors and medical equipment for his first tests. The news is not good. Dalal has a serious heart condition and it is worse than expected. He needs surgery soon.

The children are made to feel at home. They are given doughnuts and candy, a traditional gift for the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. During their stay, which lasts for weeks, the childrens'

mothers stay in a family home, helped by Israeli volunteers.

Dalal's surgery took place three days later. We were invited to see it. In the early morning little Dalal and his mother cut lonely figures in their hospital bed, clearly nervous of what lay ahead.

In the operating theater, the team of surgeons led by Lior Sasson prepared for the complex procedure to save Dalal's life. A serious obstruction in a blood vessel was preventing blood from getting to his lungs. It is a condition that only gets worse, and it is fatal.

As the operation began we spoke to Dalal's mother. She talked of Israeli hospitality. "It is a beautiful country," she said. "Everyone has been so nice and I am very happy they are taking care of my son. I am so pleased to be here in Israel."

Jonathan Miles is an American Christian who works with the charity finding children who need help. He feels the charity's ability to break down traditional barriers of hostility and suspicion is a crucial goal. "People want to get along, to live together. They want to be cared for, they want to care for others. So if we can create a space where that can happen, thank God."

Six hours after the operation began little Dalal was wheeled out of surgery. It was a complete success. Outside the intensive care unit where he must recover, Sasson explained all to Dalal's mother. Sasson explained how his enthusiasm and excitement remains as strong as ever. "I am very happy because it's really an amazing feeling to think, to know that you made a difference, and it's not just me, it's the whole system."

A day later Dalal was able to breathe on his own. He still faces weeks of recovery, but Sasson predicts he will be able to lead a normal life back in Iraq. In addition to his new health he will also have memories of the friends he made in Israel.

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