

Pakistan: Learning the words for “dream”

In Pakistan, an estimated 5,000 children work the streets surrounding the country’s busiest bus terminal. The hours are long and the work, soul destroying. But for some 350 children enrolled in World Vision’s Manzil Drop-In Centre, the chance to learn, play and dream is just around the corner. Some of the funds raised through the 30 Hour Famine will go toward helping the Manzil Drop-In Centre.

It’s play therapy time at the Manzil Drop-In Centre, and eleven-year-old Mehnaz is taking her turn. Today, it’s “the mad game”. Mehnaz shares something that made her really angry, placing a block on the stack she’s building with her peers. At the end of the game, the children join together to destroy the stack, symbolically wiping out their anger.

“To most, the simple pile of blocks seem insignificant,” says Sana Mukhtar, clinical psychologist. “But for the children at the Manzil Centre, it is a way of building trust and expressing themselves.” Mukhtar has come up with strategies to help children feel safer as they share their troubles, including using a toy telephone to discuss the events of the day.

Lives of fear

These children have many reasons to feel afraid and angry. They live in Pir Wadhai, Pakistan’s largest transit hub and home to its busiest open-air bus terminal. Pir Wadhai is notorious for illicit activities such as smuggling, drug trafficking and human trafficking.

Here, an estimated 5,000 street children struggle to survive, plagued by fear and fighting to make it through another day. They work long hours collecting oil and picking through rags and other garbage. Boys are used in “massage rooms”, or worse.

But for the 350 children enrolled in World Vision’s Manzil Drop-In Centre, the focus is shifting a little. “Manzil” meaning “aim” or “destination”, was set up in 2008 to provide a place for safe recreational activities, friendly and confidential discussions with a psychologist, health check-ups, treatments and hygiene sessions.

Learning to share

The hope is to help children play, learn, share and dream of a better future. For many children, it’s a long journey.

“They don’t think in terms of their future,” says Brian Miller, the field coordinator at Manzil. “They live ultra-practical lives. Their lives are only today. To survive, they have to live by their wits. There’s nothing else. To speak of their ‘hopes’ or ‘dreams’ you first have to explain the words.”

Sana Mukhtar helps to “explain the words” and enable children to express themselves. She describes the stories she hears, tales of poverty and hardship, homes where domestic and drug abuse are a way of life.

“Here the children don’t have to be worried about being beaten, they are free to talk, to share and to learn.”

After sufficient time has been spent in the centre some of the children are ready to attend government schools, with assistance from World Vision for their uniforms and supplies. The drop-in centre is also a place for older children to receive vocational training, preparing them for lives different than the ones they know.



Eat nothing. Do something.

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