

## **Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights Ein therapeutischer Heilgarten für Chamchamal, Kurdistan-Irak**

### **Background Information**

The Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights has built a Healing Garden in the city of Chamchamal, situated between the larger cities of Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. The project was realized also thanks to the financial support received from the Foundation Wings of Hope.

The healing garden provides a space for therapy that is especially tailored to the needs of children, adolescents and women who are survivors of domestic violence, abuse and other human rights violations, complementing the services provided by the adjacent Chamchamal Center as well as the nearby women's clinic for survivors of abductions by the terror group Islamic State, both run by the Jiyan Foundation.

The concept is based on three main pillars: animal-assisted therapy, garden therapy and social therapy. Animal-assisted therapy is a core aspect of the therapeutic work in the Healing Garden. Seeing animals at rest give humans a signal of safety and feelings of well-being, besides the development of trust in the long run, helping patients to gain back trust in humans. In the garden, patients are able to find a variety of animals, such as cats, donkeys, peacocks, goats, chickens and parrots.

Additionally, the healing garden is constructed with a special focus on conserving natural resources. The buildings in the Healing Garden are constructed from clay, a traditionally used resource that has almost disappeared in the region. It adapts to the local climate, cooling in summer and preserving warmth in the winter, eliminating the need for energy-intensive air conditioning.

In a region with limited access to clean drinking water, the Healing Garden also contains a greywater treatment plant which can purify enough water to care for gardens plants, even during the summer heat. The waste that is a byproduct of gardening and animal keeping is producing bio gas, which also creates a natural fertilizer for the garden.

While initial plans for the garden were formulated in 2011, concrete steps were taken in 2013 after securing the first funds for the project and receiving a plot of land from the city. Construction started in early 2016 and, after a delay due to political events in the country, the formal opening took place on November 28, 2018. This event garnered the attendance of some 300 people, including the Governor of Sulaymaniyah Province, the Mayor of Chamchamal, as well as other local and regional dignitaries, the architectural and engineering teams of Roswag Architects and BORDA e.V., representatives of the project partners and others.

### **The Healing Garden**

The healing garden design was part of a Master's thesis by students of landscape architecture from TU Berlin and Bauhaus University Weimar. After receiving the permission by the local administration of Chamchamal in late 2015, the Jiyan Foundation started hiring workers for starting the construction of the healing garden in early 2016. In order to do the planning and supervision for construction of the project, Roswag Architects from Germany offered their support to the project with supervising the construction phase by an architect who had worked on similar projects before.

For the construction process of the nine buildings, about 70,000 bricks were produced. By the end of 2016, the construction of the animal stables was finished. Furthermore, a biogas plant was constructed next to the stables. Funded by the German engineering NGO BORDA, the plant is built

underground and services with plant and animal waste through an automatic feeder. BORDA also provided the training needed for operating and maintaining the plant.

During the project, different kinds of animals were purchased for the garden, including sheep, chicken, geese, goats, rabbits, emus, chickens, lovebirds, big partridges, and several bird species. Additionally, several animals were donated to the healing garden such as partridges, donkeys, cats, and guinea pigs.

Wastewater treatment began in October 2017 and the healing garden has benefitted from it since then. The wastewater treatment system provides clean water for the irrigation of the plants in the garden. The irrigation is done during dusk and the outputs of this system are sufficient for the entire garden as well as a surplus of water.

In 2018 and in 2019, externally funded trainings on animal welfare and animal-assisted interventions took place both in Germany and Kurdistan. In July 2018, three therapists from Chamchamal and project director Salah Ahmad participated in an intense one-week training course on using animals in therapy on a farm in Germany. As a follow-up, an Austrian veterinary visited the healing garden in August 2018 and introduced both the animal caretakers and more therapists from Chamchamal to animal protection, welfare, and animal-assisted interventions. She also suggested improvements for the garden. A follow-up visit by the same trainer took place in November 2019, at which she delved deeper into issues of animal welfare and care, consulted with the local veterinary and made further suggestions for the improvement for specific animals such as the therapy donkeys.

Although training continues, the healing garden is already in use for beneficiaries: Women groups visit the garden at least once a month, and children every week. Guided contact with animals, mainly to reduce fears and enhance social skills, are also part of these group sessions.

The official opening ceremony of the healing garden took place on 28 October 2018. The Jiyan Foundation welcomed some 300 guests, including the governor of Sulaymaniyah province, the mayor of Chamchamal, and the architecture firm from Germany. The opening speeches were observed by a large number of local media stations. All guests were invited to explore the garden's premises and get acquainted with its therapeutic concept, the architecture, and the environmental engineering solutions.

The opening of the garden was followed by a symposium held at Charmo University in Chamchamal. An in-depth series of talks addressed the mental health services, ecological architecture, and green technologies. A total of 150 people from various backgrounds and professions attended, including the dean of Charmo University, and students and teachers from different universities in Kurdistan.

### **Contribution by the Foundation Wings of Hope**

The Foundation Wings of Hope contributed continuously to the funding necessary to enable a functioning healing garden since 2013. In particular, it supported the construction of the animal stables, as well as the purchase of animals, plants and trees, gardening equipment and other materials required for the construction of the Healing Garden.

This funding will have a lasting impact on the project. The seeds purchased already yield a steady harvest. Raising and caring for plants and eventually picking and enjoying the fruits can be extremely satisfying and meaningful within the treatment plan of the clients participating in garden therapies.

Animals procured for the garden through Wings of Hope funding include poultry, birds and bees (including beehives), as well as feed and equipment for caretaking. The animals contribute to the atmosphere in the garden, but also generate income for the upkeep through the production of eggs and honey, while clients and visitors can interact with them.

Finally, Wings of Hope funds have helped to cover costs for project staff and the lease of the land, which has been permanently granted to Jiyan Foundation's healing garden project by the Mayor's office at the opening celebration.

## **Conclusion**

The garden has become an integral part of Chamchamal. Families and individuals from the town and clients of the women's clinic visit the garden regularly, as do school classes, university students and international visitors. While the latter want to learn about the sustainable buildings, animal-assisted interventions and environmentally friendly technologies, the former benefit from the garden as a healing space. Clients visit it in a therapeutic context and in company of their therapists. Since staff underwent training in animal-assisted interventions in Germany and Kurdistan, group therapy sessions using guided contact with animals are taking place both for adult female and child clients.

## **Pictures**

The progress of the garden is regularly updated in an online photo album on Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jiyanfoundation/albums/72157654284881188>