In Za’atari and Azraq Camps, refugee households are experiencing severe restrictions in movements, shortages in essential goods and services, a spike in unemployment, which has led to a recent increase in child labor and a twin pandemic of psychological distress and domestic violence as a direct result to COVID-19 situation. A recent protection survey report revealed that 82% of female respondents reported declined psychosocial wellbeing as a result of the pandemic.

Program Brief

Mercy Corps’ long standing ISHRAK (ﺇﺵﺭﺍﻙ) meaning ‘engagement, is a family strengthening project that provides psychosocial support to fortify bonds between family members in stressful situations. Within the ISHRAK program, there are three integrated pillars: (1) Empowering Individuals; (2) Family Integration; and (3) Community Support. It is designed to address the interlinked problems of toxic stress, domestic and gender based violence, and the lack of agency enjoyed by women and girls. Within this iteration of this program, ISHRAK partners with refugee girls and caregivers to promote behavior change strategies that reaffirm gender equality, norms change, and girls’ empowerment.

Interventions

Empowering Individuals

ISHRAK supports the physical, emotional, and social wellbeing of individuals through a wide variety of activities. These include a safe space to play, cultural heritage lessons, art, filmmaking, and parenting programs. These programs are designed to spark creativity; build confidence, skills, and positive relationships between children and older family members, and ensure young Syrian refugees have a connection to their homeland that is a source of pride and strength. Furthermore, ISHRAK program serves in providing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) awareness raising, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and mitigation for adolescent girls.
FAMILY INTEGRATION

To ensure that the skills learned by individuals are transferred to the rest of the family, ISHRAK trains parents and caregivers on psychosocial theories and activities related to child development so they can facilitate activities in their own homes and family spaces. The aim of this approach is to empower caregivers, strengthen relationships and support the wellbeing of the whole family.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Graduates from the individual and family focused programs form peer support groups and lead activities for the wider community. This increases the reach and ensures skills and knowledge formed at the individual and household levels are being transferred to the wider community. By leading and facilitating different activities, members of the peer support groups can increase their own confidence and strengthen their understanding about child protection issues. This can lead to strengthened social networks, improved wellbeing and new pathways for skill-building.

In addition, in order to strengthen girls and families’ connection to the full range of camp services, ISHRAK activates a referral system through strong referral pathways to GBV case management, health services, and other offerings from partners throughout Za'atari and Azraq Camps.