

Iraq Kurdistan mission 25 May - 3 June 2016

Erbil, 26 May 2016

We arrived safely in Erbil around 15:00 and Judit picked us up from the Airport. After having dropped off the luggage we went for a coffee in a cafe with a garden and a nice cool breeze. We had dinner in the garden restaurant in Ainkawa. We passed the American consulate where the bomb attack happened a year ago. What always has been a busy street was now almost a small ghost town. Shops and restaurants deserted and the damage done by the bomb still very much visible.

We had time to catch up with Judit and discuss options for supporting other organizations that could benefit from Reiki.

Thursday we had the morning off so we went to see the Citadel in the center of Erbil. Because Judit knows the big boss we got a lift up the hill. We had a tour around the Citadel including the bath house and a palace that is normally not accessible.

Then we went for lunch and tea in the bazar, before we met up with Younis, the photographer that we met last time, in 2014. Younis had his Reiki 1 training then.

Younes says that Reiki helps him a lot, helps him deal with the things he sees in his job as a photographer and helps him to get out of the world a little. It makes him relaxed, with using Reiki he does something for himself. So we asked him to connect with organizations to ask if they would be interested in Reiki training.

Friday, 27 May

After a good night sleep we had a relaxed morning with yoghurt, coffee & Judit's cats. We got a drop off at the Classy hotel at noon. The UPP driver picked us up and transported us with hyper speed to Duhok via Akre. We arrived at a full UPP guesthouse/office and we got a room for the two of us.

After that we really needed some food so we went for Merdo restaurant and a good kebab. It was a good experience to walk in the streets and feel that the situation was absolutely safe.

To bed quite early because of the course planned for...

Saturday 28 May.

Pick up at 8:45 for the Mental Health Center. There we met Shaimaa, Zahra, Zinar, Rezan en Kavar, again, our Reiki 1 students in 2014 and now our students for Reiki 2. We had the room with the blue carpet and the toys and we had a great course. Shaimaa was a great translator and understood perfectly what we explained. We practiced symbols and distance treatment and of course we took pictures of the group during and after the certificate ceremony. From 10:00 to 12:30 with a coffee break and it was a super relaxed training.

Shaimaa took us home and we went for lunch. Mr Merdo himself recognized us and gave us

some star dishes and we picked up yoghurt, bananas and crisps in the supermarket. Time for a break with tea in the sun on the balcony, a post on Facebook and a nap. Then we sat with Salam and Thomasso and music on the balcony. Thomasso asked for a Reiki treatment and shared his acupuncture story with us.

Sunday, 29 May 2016

2 hours in the car to Gawilan. We did the sessions in the same porta cabins as 2 years ago. We treated around 32-33 people, men, mostly staff and woman, staff and non staff. The service was good and the air conditioning made a big difference compared to doing sessions in a tent. Omar stayed with us the whole time, as did the two social workers. Of course a lot of pictures were taken after the sessions, always fun. Then we treated the last of the staff and Shiraz and the driver in the UPP tent. Without lunch, but very content we returned home, 2 hours. No time to meet the camp management; we were already late.

At home we had a beer and an early dinner with our Turkish friend. After some more discussion about the future of the programme of Iraqi Kurdistan we went to bed early.

Monday 30 May 2016

With the whole team of Gulistan to Sekhan, 40 minutes. We met Gulistan for the first time and she was a refugee in 1991 and grew up in the Netherlands. She returned in September 2014 with her husband and 2 kids, to help. So we had 100 things to talk about, which we did. We learned about the MHPSS project that she is starting up and that will run till March 2017. She stated that there is too little help, specifically for people that return from having lived under Daesh rule.

We had a great place to do the sessions, in their office building and we started doing the staff. Joop treated around 10 people and I took a nap after 4. We will keep in touch, maybe there are other opportunities to work together in the future and some of the staff have indicated that they would like to do a Reiki 1 training.

Back home around 14:00, a better time with the travel time included than yesterday. I needed some more sleep and after that we did the Reiki 2 course for Caterina. Irene came and I gave her a Reiki treatment on the couch. When it was time for dinner we went to Merdo's for a soup for me and some proper food for Joop. Back at the UPP guesthouse we met Saman and we talked about Reiki, because he organized the Reiki 1 training at the Youth Center for Tuesday and Wednesday.

Tuesday 31st May 2016

Next morning we had a pick up at 8:00 to go to Domiz 1. We picked up Ziad, the psychologist and when we arrived at Domiz we waited for Sipan, with a stroll and a very strong Nescafé. Sipan let us in and I gave Ziad Reiki; he wants to learn how to do this himself. After that Sipan brought us to Serwer where we got a room to do the sessions in. A lot of people walked in for a session, we counted approximately 40 people in all. Also 3 Peshmerga came because we invited them in! Sipan was very helpful and we got to enjoy a rehearsal of traditional dancing in the next room. Around 14:00 the three of us went for a late lunch.

Back at the UPP guesthouse we had time for a quick nap and then we were picked up by Saman. At the Youth Center we started with 14 students of very diverse backgrounds, journalists, activists, photographers and even decorators and some of them came from Mosul.

The training went well and Saman turned out to be an excellent translator. We finished around half 7 and then Saman invited us for dinner at his family's house, awesome hospitable people & super food. Home around 10.

Wednesday 1st June

Today was Domiz 2 day. Pick up again at 8:00 and then to Domiz 2, to meet again with Kardar. Same routine as in the other camps: first some tea, then to the porta cabin that was our location for the day, organize chairs and start a session with Kardar, so he could explain to the people that would come how it works.

We saw a lot of women, some children and had a lot of positive feedback. People felt relaxed, both physically as well as mentally and 1 woman said that she felt like a new born. Kadar brought us lunch and we sat outside the UPP porta cabin drinking tea when some more people came by for a chat and a Reiki session.

Ziad was able to leave a bit earlier when we called and we got to go and have a nap before Saman picked us up for the second day of the training. 13 people came back, which was cool. A couple of the students had to leave at 18:00 so we were on a tight schedule. Everything worked out perfectly and after the certificates and a zillion photo's we closed the session with tea in the kitchen.

Then Saman took us up the mountain with a couple of cold beers. The view was amazing!! We got home around 23:30.

Thursday, 2 June 2016

8:30 to Akre, a hour and a half drive. Tea with the new camp manager and off to the library. There we were almost swamped! So many people came in, starting around 10:30 and it stopped only because we closed the door and asked Salar to stop people from coming in. We think we did sessions for around 35-40 people, no breaks 😊 We had to leave at 14:00 for Erbil. When we finished around 13:45 we really had to have some lunch, so Salar took us the Akre city Center for a shawarma. Coming back to the fort the driver from Erbil had arrived and took us straight to Judit's apartment.

Nap and shower and diner with friends in the garden restaurant with a couple of cold beers.

Friday 3 June 2016

The day for souvenir shopping in the bazaar followed by packing bags and leaving for the airport.

It has been an amazing trip. Even though Reiki or similar complementary alternative medicine is not known in Kurdistan it does not keep the people from being very open to it. People want to try, experience and quite a few want to learn how to do Reiki themselves after having had a 10 minute session. One woman in Gawilan kept explaining that to me over and over again indicating that she wanted to support her whole family with Reiki.

Most of the people we have met have been through very tough times and it is amazing how strong they are, how friendly and how open. If we have been able to give a little bit of support during the sessions, meetings, chats and training then our mission was successful. What we received in smiles, hugs, chats, exchanges and thankfulness has by far exceeded whatever we brought.

Of course we want to thank everyone who made this trip possible, by giving us financial, logistics and/or energetic support 😊