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The Rainbow - Peace Bird Art School

By Donna Mulhearn

Music, clapping, singing, dancing and a guest appearance by Mickey and Minnie Mouse! Hundreds of happy kids, and their just-as-happy parents...

It was the opening of Peace Bird Art School in Al-Doura district of Baghdad and the neighbourhood was buzzing with celebration.

The large crowd squeezed onto the roof-top theatre to enjoy a colourful show from one of Iraq's famous singers to mark the opening of this new centre for children.

The kids laughed and squealed with delight. I watched on with a smile and happy tears in my eyes.

The day had been much anticipated by the local community. Children had started hovering around the front gates of the building weeks before and asked every day: "When will it be open?"

Peace Bird Art School is a project of the organization "Childhood Voices", an Iraqi organization which formed after the war to work with disadvantaged children.

The philosophy of Peace Bird Art School is to help Iraqi children heal from trauma and reach their full potential through creative play therapy.

The school has a music room, an art room, ceramics studio, theatre, computer room and outdoor play area. Most of the children in Al-Doura could never have dreamed of having access to such equipment in the past.

Teachers who are professionals in their field coach the children in these areas. Child psychologist are on hand to identify any emotional problems the children might be exhibiting and then begin one-on-one work with them. But the main therapy is play. Allowing the child to be in the present moment with a ball, a colouring pad, a lump of clay, a keyboard.

I walked through the school the day of the opening. It is painted with bright colours, there are stickers and posters on the walls, fluffy toys hanging from the ceiling. I saw many wide-eyed children walking around in a state of bliss.

"It is like they are in heaven now," said one father of two young boys.

"This is what they need: to laugh and smile, to learn new things which will help them forget about the bombs and the tanks."

There was a long queue at the registration table as the parents signed up their children to the place where they would learn new things.

I believe that in situations where it seems as if there is no hope and no light at the end of the tunnel, then we can create that hope and make the light.

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<http://electroniciraq.net/news/1321.shtml>