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**An Interdisciplinary  
Response to a  
Community in Crisis:  
The Kurdish Family  
Project**

Presented by the  
McMaster Family Health  
Team



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**McMaster Family Health  
Team**

- Interdisciplinary Service Model present for twenty years at McMaster Teaching units
- Interdisciplinary teaching and service provision, BS, the team room
- Has expanded with new FHT funding
- Physicians, nurses, social workers, dieticians, lactation consultant, pharmacists



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## Identification of a Community Challenge

- Interdisciplinary Conversations
  - Physicians and social work – complex cases
  - Emerging patterns
  - What is best practice?
  - How do we respond to systemic community concerns from a primary care model
  - Developing the map

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## The Kurds in Canada

- Life in Kurdistan
  - 1988: bombing and gassing
  - A people without a home
- The flight to Turkey
- Life in the camps
- Immigration-where is the welcome?
- Moving beyond the trauma:
  - life in Canada
  - life in the new Iraq

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Mountain Refugees

The Kurds have a saying "the Mountains are our only Friends". They sought shelter there from Saddam's tyranny on the northern border with Turkey. They were starving and freezing to death at a rate of 400 a day when the US physically went in to bring them out and in effect save them.

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These images bear a striking and disturbing resemblance to WW2 camps. They continue to exist, albeit to a lesser degree and are regularly checked by NGO's but they still exist in Southern Iraq.



Refugee Camps

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The inhumanity of Saddam's regime became quite evident following these attacks. There were no insurgents. It was women and children who paid the heavy price. This is genocide pure and simple.

Halabja Children

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### Problems Identified at The Family Health Team

- Confusion RE: Canadian Health care
  - What is a family doctor?
  - What is a cumulative health record?
  - How does one get a prescription?
  - How can I feel this unwell and not be sick?
  - I am in pain and deserve a disability cheque please fill out forms so I can get one

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## Problems Identified at The Family Health Team

- Translation needed
- Illiteracy – particularly of women
- Great belief in the presence of serious physical illness
- What are the long term effects of gassing?
- Uncommon physical presentations
- PTSD: How does one build trust?

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The long-term effects of these injuries have not been addressed. The young women are now infertile and birth defects are higher here than anywhere else in Kurdistan. The look in the eyes of this child are what haunt a lot of the women in these targeted communities in Kurdistan and is responsible for their often "depressed" state of mind.

## Halabja Child



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## Father & Son

This image has been immortalized into a statue in Halabja and has become a symbol of what was lost in the gas attacks launched by Saddam in cities and villages across Iraq. The father died trying to shield his baby from the gas. Those who did not perish are struggling with the long-term effects of the gas attacks: infertility, respiratory problems, skin afflictions etc.

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## Interdisciplinary Conversations

- Physicians referrals to social work
- Emerging patterns
- Conversation and Concern
- Systemic intervention needed
- How do we do this?
- How do we create allies, time and funding?



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## An Ally

- Ongoing conversation with service providers and the community
- An Ally emerges: Shelair Kittani
- How to begin?



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## Community Focus Groups: Interdisciplinary Conversations with a Community

- Creating a flyer in two languages or three?
- Complexity of the community was discovered
- Contacting members of the community and urging participation
- Setting realistic goals



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## Goal Setting with the Community

- Focus Group Meetings
- Invitations, timing, food, children
- Beginning conversations
- The legacy of the needs assessment

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## Goal Setting with the Community

- Understanding the lack of trust
- The dream of a community centre
- Finding common ground: a health/community centre

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## Developing Community Partnerships

- The role of McMaster
  - Clinical discussion at a team meeting
  - Presentation to the McMaster Faculty
  - University support
  - Involvement of learners

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## Developing Interdisciplinary Community Partnerships

- Work with SISO
- Experience from inner city projects
- Partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University School of Social Work
- Kurdish Community volunteers



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## The Election of a Community Board

- Lights, Camera, Action
- The hotly contested election
- Post election let down
- Expectations
- How does change occur
- Interdisciplinary Participation



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## Creation of an Interdisciplinary McMaster Board

- Why two boards?
- Interdisciplinary board
- The challenge of inter board collaboration



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## Involvement of Students

- Learning best practice for work with patients with PTSD
- Role of interdisciplinary learners
- MSW field placements
- Community Health residents involvement



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## First Funding Secured: A Success ?

- Communities in Action Grant
  - Implementation coordinators
  - Physical activity
  - Men's soccer
  - Women's ESL and Computer training
  - Youth dancing



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## Hiring of Kurdish Community Members-Implementation Coordinators

- Creating a job description
- Partnerships in the hiring process
- Impact on the partnership



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## Clarification of the Goal

- Recent funding applications
- Centre of Excellence in Immigration Health
- A Kurdish physician

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## Partnership with Friends of Kurdistan

- Amy Ball
- Medical School Partnership
- Support of McMaster University
- Medical Supplies

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Dr. Sadik is our northern contact for future medical opportunities in that area. He has attributed the high rate of childhood cancer in the area to a lack of an x-ray vest at the hospital.



Pharmacy in Barzan

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Barzan Feast

A demonstration of their generosity to a western stranger they had never met. The head of this household has watched his village leveled 17 times since 1940 and his father was taken by Saddam and never seen again. Yet he does not hold any anger. He just wants peace and stability for his family and his country



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One of 4 schools in the capital of Erbil that teaches in English. This photo is taken in the headmaster's office. This where the Pen Pal program has taken root and where we are outfitting a "Canadian room" as the Germans have done. They have asked for English text books and educational books as their weight is cost prohibitive to ship and are a purely luxury item.



Hawler Typical School



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### Plans for the Future

- Funding for the Community Centre
- Development of a health care plan
- Sustainable funding
- Not for profit status
- Development of Kurdish Board
- October Trip to Kurdistan
- Partnership/Increase Capacity



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## Friends of Kurdistan

Amy went to establish a Women's Shelter in Barzan. This is where Saddam Hussein took 8,000 of their men and boys and slaughtered them in Baghdad, leaving generations of women without supports. It will cost \$15,000 US to build the shelter and we are working on securing that funding.



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## Friends of Kurdistan

Need for the following:

- Sewing machines
- Fabric
- Office Supplies
- Computers
- Rugs (flat pile Persian)
- Kerosene stoves
- Children's clothes
- Diapers
- Thread



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## Friends of Kurdistan

Amy has also started a Pen Pal Project between a Canadian School and Hawler Typical School in Erbil, Kurdistan. We need more classrooms willing to write to Kurdish students as they all want a Canadian friend and are taking their courses in English.



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## Friends of Kurdistan

The school also needs the following:

- English textbooks for all grades – primary through to college/university – in all subjects but especially science/math/computers
- Computers with programs
- Pencils/crayons/paper
- DVD player/scanner/printer/photocopier
- Kerosene heaters for rural schools
- Books for library – especially on Canada
- Video cameras



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## Friends of Kurdistan

Medical Supplies for the Public Health Centre in Erbil & the Hospital in Barzan are also in huge demand – there is no medical supply that would be refused as the situation is that dire.



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## Friends of Kurdistan

- All first aid products: bandages, ointment, i/v, syringe
- Antibiotics – particularly for children
- Suture kits
- Wheelchairs/crutches
- Products to treat women
- Burn treatment products
- X-Ray vests
- Topical creams
- \*Public health nurses



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## Questions?

- Lynn Dykeman [lynnd@cogeco.ca](mailto:lynnd@cogeco.ca)
- Inge Schabot [ischabo@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ischabo@mcmaster.ca)



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