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Film "Including Samuel" To Support Iraqi Disability Rights Movement

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DURHAM, N.H. - The award-winning documentary film "Including Samuel" is partnering with Mercy Corps, a global relief and development agency, to support the growing civil rights movement of the two million - nearly 1 in 13 - Iraqi citizens who are disabled. In addition to being translated into Arabic, the film will be incorporated into the Mercy Corps People with Disabilities Advocacy Program, which is designed to provide education, advocacy, and outreach to ensure that Iraqis with disabilities fully participate in society.

Photojournalist Dan Habib, filmmaker in residence at the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability, made the documentary to honestly chronicle his family's efforts to include his eight-year-old son Samuel, who has cerebral palsy, in every facet of their lives. The film also features four other families with varied inclusion experiences, plus interviews with dozens of teachers, young people, parents, and disability rights experts. "Including Samuel" is a highly personal, passionately photographed film that captures the cultural and systemic barriers to inclusion in schools and communities. The Including Samuel Project is based at the Institute on Disability at UNH.

"In a country where the word 'accessibility' lacks definition, resources like 'Including Samuel' help create an understanding of how people with disabilities can be included in all aspects of society," said Tiana Tozer, Mercy Corps Iraq program manager. "The film will enhance the Mercy Corps People with Disabilities Advocacy Program by sparking our young advocates' creativity and imaginations, and opening their eyes to the possibilities of what Iraq can be for them in the future."

There is strong societal and internal stigma that Iraqis with disabilities face each day, Tozer says. Changing cultural attitudes that exist toward people with disabilities is central to the Mercy Corps People with Disabilities Advocacy Program as well as the message in the film "Including Samuel."

Habib says that there is a universal truth about people with disabilities around the world.

"They are generally undervalued and underestimated, whether it is my son Samuel in Concord, New Hampshire, or a young boy in Baghdad who lost a limb to the war."

Mercy Corps works amid disasters, conflicts, chronic poverty, and instability to unleash the potential of people who can win against nearly impossible odds. Since 1979, Mercy Corps has provided \$1.5 billion in assistance to people in 106 nations. The agency's unified global programs reach nearly 16.4 million people in more than 35 countries. Since 2003, Mercy Corps has been supporting a social justice movement in Iraq that supports the independence of those who experience a disability. Tozer's work in Iraq was featured on the NBC Nightly News (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032619/#25008541>). For more information, visit the Mercy Corps website at www.mercycorps.org.

Dan Habib, the director, producer, and cinematographer of "Including Samuel," is the Filmmaker in Residence at the Institute on Disability / UCED at the University of New Hampshire. For more information, including a film trailer, visit the Including Samuel website at www.includingsamuel.com.

The Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire was established in 1987 to provide a coherent university-based focus for the improvement of knowledge, policies, and practices related to the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. Its mission is to advance policies and systems changes, promising practices, education, and research that strengthen communities to ensure full access, equal opportunities, and participation for all persons.

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Photographs available to download:

Still images from the film "Including Samuel." Credit: Dan Habib.

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2008/aug/samuel_bubble_color_lores.jpg

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2008/aug/samuel_classroom_color.JPG

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2008/aug/samuel_dan_tball.JPG

Mercy Corp's Tiana Tozer, right, holds hands with Rana, who is a member of the Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organizations, during a meeting at the Al Rami Center for Autism in Baghdad. Courtesy Mercy Corps.

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2008/aug/Mercy_Corps_a.jpg

