

LILY'S STORY

**Inclusion of children with Down's syndrome
Manahel success story, January 2023**

A pioneering education programme is providing high quality support for children like Lily, ensuring she can access education and get the help she needs to thrive against a backdrop of conflict and multiple crises in northwest Syria.



Lily¹ (not her real name) is a nine-year-old girl from northwest Syria who has Down's syndrome. Like many other children with disabilities in northwest Syria, Lily missed out on her early school years due to a lack of accessible classrooms and trained teachers that was exacerbated by conflict and instability which made even the most basic services hard to reach. Lily's parents were determined to do everything they could to further her education and, a year ago, decided to search for a place where their daughter could make friends, have adventures, and live a meaningful life. Her mother enrolled her in a nearby centre for children with disabilities but it turned out to be inadequately equipped and failed to meet Lily's specialised mental health needs or protect her from harm, with Lily exhibiting signs of anti-social behavior.

Lily's mother refused to give up hope of finding a suitable school where her daughter would be safe and receive the individualised care she needed. A few weeks later, she learned about a centre which provides inclusive education and quality support for children with disabilities operated by the Manahel Programme, which provides education to primary school-aged children.

The next day, Lily's mother visited the Manahel Special Education Centre to have a look around before bringing Lily. She described Lily's requirements and the negative experiences she had received at the other centre. The special education teacher at Manahel, who has many years of experience and has cared for dozens of children with similar needs, reassured Lily's mother by explaining the support programme and her background in special education. The teacher also described Manahel's integration approach and how she would create an individualised education plan for Lily to help her transition into mainstream classes. Lily's mother was comforted by the discussion and felt that she had finally found an environment where Lily could thrive.

The teacher spent a few days with Lily to help her settle in and get to know her personalised needs after her arrival. She developed an Individual Education Plan for Lily, detailing her specific requirements and the services that the school would offer to meet them. This plan outlined a series of objectives designed to help Lily build confidence and positive social habits with her peers.

In her first year since enrolling in the special education centre, Lily has made tremendous strides towards the goals set out for her. She has shown a remarkable curiosity for the world around her and an eagerness to interact with others. Although her case is complex, she is now able to identify different colours, shapes, and sizes. She can perform basic arithmetic and her social skills have improved. Her mother praised the dedication and excellent work of her teacher.



Lily's teacher is impressed by the progress of her pupil:

“Lily feels safe and happy, especially when she is carrying out her activities. I am proud of her achievements so far. Together with her remarkable capabilities, we will achieve what others believe is impossible.”

MANAHEL HIGHLIGHTS

Within the 157 QE schools², Manahel has established 34 specialised education centres to help the future intergration of students. These centres are supporting a total of 182 children (51% female). Based on a thorough evaluation, well-trained teachers develop an Individualised Education Plan for each student. The assessment identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each child, while the plan identifies academic, social, and adaptive skill goals to improve the educational outcomes of children with disabilities and provide a road map for their success.

In November 2022, Manahel conducted a capacity evaluation of the special education teachers and determined that five teachers required intensive training on special education concepts and principles, as well as on mental health and well-being of children with disabilities. The six-day training focuses on inclusive education concepts and tools (including the Individual Education Plan and Alternative Education Plan), mental health promotion, and the identification of psychological, social, and behavioural concerns. To ensure continuity of professional development, Manahel led a Learning Circle that centred on the role of parents and guardians and ways of engaging with the school to monitor their children's learning.

² During the bridging period, Manahel is supporting 157 schools with technical delivery including literacy and numeracy, psychosocial support and safeguarding support.