

Our Big Dream





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Our Big Dream
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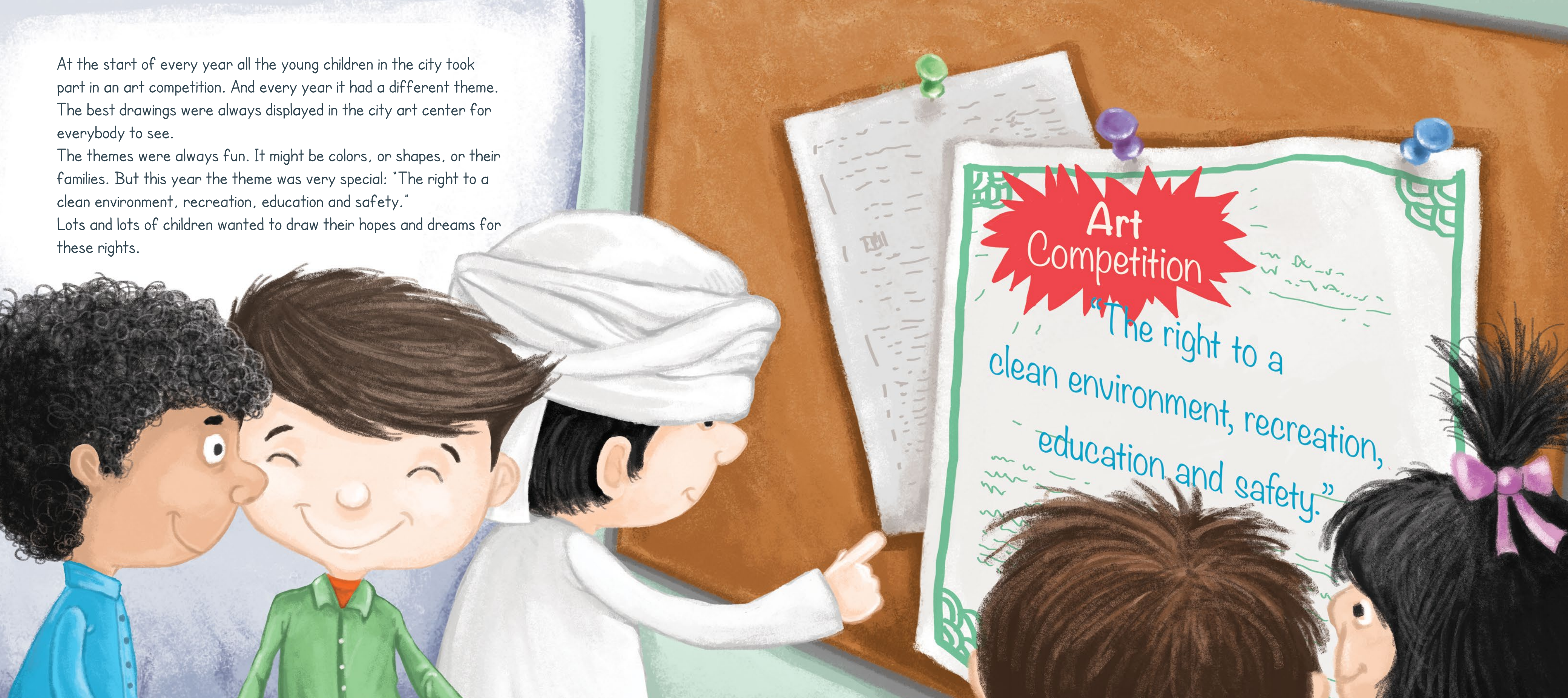
A Story By Sahar Naja Mahfouz
Translated By Rula Baalbaki
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At the start of every year all the young children in the city took part in an art competition. And every year it had a different theme. The best drawings were always displayed in the city art center for everybody to see.

The themes were always fun. It might be colors, or shapes, or their families. But this year the theme was very special: "The right to a clean environment, recreation, education and safety."

Lots and lots of children wanted to draw their hopes and dreams for these rights.



Karim chose to draw what he had always wanted, and in exactly the way he had always imagined it. He drew a large park with water fountains, water games and a ferris-wheel. And in his park, he drew special places for children, and paths that helped everyone move around easily. He colored the sketch very carefully. Then it was ready for the competition.



As for Hind, she loved the sea, just as her dad and grandad did. They told her stories and sang songs of how things used to be. She decided to show herself exploring the water, surrounded by beautiful fish. And all around she drew different wooden boats and different ways of fishing from older times, before she was even born.



Saleh wanted to explore space. He read about the nearby moon and distant galaxies and loved looking at the night sky. So Salah drew a beautiful observatory with giant telescopes where he could watch stars, planets and the whole universe.



Majd's dream was both different and new. He imagined a place where he and his friends would gather after classes. There he would develop his hobbies: he could learn how to play on the oud, how to swim, and how to play basketball. He imagined a children's center full of activities, and that is what he drew.





Noura submitted a drawing of the school of her dreams. It was a school that would teach kids about sharing, seeking, and exploring different experiences by interacting with nature. Her school would have the biggest library in the city and everybody could go there. Even kids with in wheelchairs or with other special needs. She had always wanted her brother to go to the same school as her.

Nasser had a passion for anything related to wildlife, especially local animals. He collected pictures and knew what they ate, and how they slept and reproduced. He knew all about their hiding places and how they could live in the hot desert. Nasser had always dreamed meeting and studying animals so his sketch was an exploration center for the wildlife of the Arabian Peninsula.



Little Alyaa's family talked all the time. They exchanged ideas and made decisions together. She had always dreamed of making her voice heard by all grownups, not just her mum and dad. She wanted the right to suggest, discuss, and learn things. She wanted to use her voice to demand her rights and the rights of other kids to be safe from harm and assault. And so she made wishes, dreamed and then painted her dream. A children's jury council where she was listening, discussing and taking part in deciding the future for all of them.



The day of the competition, everyone went to the art centre. They came from all over the city to see if whose drawings would be going on display.

In the courtyard, the students came forward and placed their drawings side by side. And here was a surprise that no one had expected.





Because when they were put together the drawings formed a picture of a city. It was their city and all their dreams were there! And it was very, very real.



What is your dream?



Office of ‘Sharjah Child Friendly City’

How did Sharjah become a child and youth friendly city?

The Emirate of Sharjah has been focusing its attention on children and youth for many years. Sharjah has established a comprehensive strategy to provide them with a safe life and special care so as to guarantee their rights in all aspects. Its continuous efforts to empower and advance children and youth was globally recognized and earned Sharjah the well-deserved ‘United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund’ (UNICEF) title ‘A Child and Youth Friendly City’.

Awarding this title to Sharjah did not come by mere coincidence. It was the carefully studied and inevitable outcome of forty year of efforts founded on the ambitious visions of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Muhammad Al Qasimi; Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and his wife Sheikha Jawaher Bint Muhammad Al Qasimi; President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs. From this council emerged several foundations, initiatives and authorities that integrated together to care for children and youth, protect them and provide all the support necessary to refine their skills and develop their capacities and talents. The efforts exerted by the Office of “Sharjah a Child Friendly City” to back Sharjah in earning the title “Children and Youth Friendly City” proved to be a hard-earned crowning of that noble approach.

In May 2016, the Office of “Sharjah a Child Friendly City”, tasked with the implementation of plans and strategies that provide support for children and youth in Sharjah, applied to join the initiative of ‘International Child and Youth Friendly Cities’ affiliated to UNICEF. The office’s aim was supplementing the efforts exerted by the Emirate to enhance policies and support measures that positively affect the growth and welfare of children. That fact makes

Sharjah a unique place for children and youth to live, play and learn.

This endeavor is consistent with the predispositions of the UAE and its commitment to secure the highest standards of care and welfare of children. The country endorsed the Children’s Rights Agreement in 1997. However, the efforts that aimed at advancing the children’s status, at the local and federal levels, had started long before that date. The issue of children’s rights occupies a significant priority in the vision of the development state.

The office of ‘Sharjah Child Friendly City’ signed the first memorandum agreement with the UNICEF in August 2016 to start preparing Sharjah Emirate as a candidate for the global initiative. From September 2016 and until February 2017, the office performed an assessment study and an internal analysis of children’s and youth’s situation in the Emirate, in collaboration with all children’s foundations. It also organized numerous dialogue sessions with specialists, children and their families.

In February 2017, the nomination of Sharjah to the global initiative was announced. A short term implementation plan (for one year only) was launched in association with UNICEF to work on achieving the requirements of the accreditation. A special guidance committee for the project was formed from directors of government departments and children’s institutions. Initiatives and strategies to protect children’s rights were also launched.

Up until June 2018, the office organized a number of activities, meetings and visits to complete the accreditation requirements. It held 150 official meetings with government departments and

institutions concerned with the protection and welfare of children. It also organized 30 discussion panels for 350 male and female students from public and private schools; children with special needs and members of ‘the Rubu’ Qarn’ Foundation for the creation of leaders and innovators, as well as 20 visits and events for children and youth.

The office held three workshops for the cadres of the foundations involved with children, in addition to nine dialogue sessions and two meetings of the project’s guidance committee. It signed two agreement memorandums with the UNICEF.

In May 2018, and further to a comprehensive assessment of Sharjah’s efforts, the UNICEF announced Sharjah as the first “Child and Youth friendly City” at the global level, in accordance with the new criteria and logo of the ‘Initiative of Children and Youth Friendly Cities’. His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Muhammad Al Qasimi; Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah received the first international accreditation certificate comprising the new global logo of the ‘Initiative of Children and Youth Friendly Cities’. The event took place during a private session with Sharjah’s children, attended by representatives from the Sharjah Children Shoura Council and Sharjah Youth Shoura council, as well as a number of school students from the Emirate.

To consolidate this achievement, the Office of ‘Sharjah Child Friendly City’ established the general framework of the action plan of the project “Sharjah Child and Youth Friendly City” for the upcoming years 2019-2021. That was done in consultation and

coordination with hundreds of children and youth from private and public schools; Sharjah city for humanitarian services; the children associated with the foundations affiliated to ‘Rubu’ Qarn Foundation for the creation of leaders and innovators’, along with other foundations working with children, universities, social entities and families.

The initiative ‘Children and Youth Friendly Cities’ was launched in 1996 at the United Nations conference on human settlements (HABITAT -UN). UNICEF supervises the implementation of this initiative in 36 countries around the world. It encompasses more than 30 million children and youth under its aegis. The aim is that children (from birth until 24 years of age) acquire all their rights, which are stipulated in the ‘Global Convention on the Rights of the Child’ in 1989.

The initiative ‘Children and Youth Friendly Cities’ comprises five international goals that the accredited cities are committed to include in their strategies and in the working mechanisms of the foundations concerned with children. The goals are: Every child and youth must feel his importance and be treated equally and respectfully by society and all authorities; taking into consideration the opinions, needs and priorities of children and youth when preparing legislations, policies, programs and budgets related to them; availability of basic services for every child and youth; securing a safe and clean environment for children and youth; providing them with the opportunity to enjoy family life, play and entertainment.







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