



## FIRST PERSON A Young Mother Stands Up for Herself

**Woman finds in herself the calling to help others overcome social stigma**

Ten years ago, Amira owned a beauty salon, drove her own car, and helped her husband pay the household bills.

Her life, however, changed in an instant when she was hit by a car. While she was left disabled and was learning to walk again, her husband divorced her. Penniless, she worried how she would support her two young children. Divorced women in Jordanian society are particularly vulnerable, and Amira was desperate to find a means to feed her children.



Photo: Family Health International (FHI)

Thanks to the work of courageous people such as Amira, the women from the Ray of Light program in Jordan (here selling handicrafts at an exhibition) have empowered themselves and each other.

***“I always had trouble standing up for myself. Now, I understand that I have rights, and I can defend the rights of other women as well”, said Amira, an outreach coordinator for a women’s project in Jordan.***

She became aware of a USAID-supported program called “Bushra” (Ray of Light), which provided her with hope and a future. Amira began working at Bushra as a peer educator to provide HIV/AIDS awareness and behavior change counseling activities for vulnerable women in low-income areas.

In Jordanian society, even the discussion of HIV/AIDS is a cultural taboo. Amira saw that she could help other women through this program. Added to the stigma of divorce, Amira also faced the perception in the community that she spread knowledge about an “immoral disease.”

The challenges did not stop Amira from continuing forward to make a difference in the lives of women whose stories were not much different than her own. Thanks to her energy and enthusiasm, she was soon offered a full-time position as an outreach coordinator.

Amira credits the USAID program with changing her life. She added, “I always had trouble standing up for myself. Now, I understand that I have rights, and I can defend the rights of other women as well. I talk to my friends and their children about HIV/AIDS and how they can protect themselves. I am supporting myself and my children again. I have come a long way.”