



The Voice of Innocence

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF HELP THE AFGHAN CHILDREN (HTAC)

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Building New Lives for Landmine Survivors

Noor's Story

Many 'Voice of Innocence' readers are already familiar with HTAC's long history in rehabilitating landmine survivors. In 2003, HTAC 'Bicycles for Amputees' facility in Kabul began producing bicycles that have since benefited several thousand Afghans who were the unfortunate victims of landmine accidents. More recently, HTAC's partnership with the Marshall Legacy Institute/CHAMPS program has increased landmine awareness among Afghans and raised money for selected landmine survivors for prosthetics and rehabilitative care. One such survivor is Noor.

Noor is a lovely 20-year old woman who lives in the Laghman Province of Afghanistan. When Noor was 16-years old she lost her left leg to a landmine close to her parent's home. Today she has a new leg because of the CHAMPS International Afghanistan project, co-sponsored by HTAC and the Marshall Legacy Institute (MLI). Now, with two small children (a son 9-months old and a daughter who is 4-years old), she can walk with ease, do household chores, and even plays with her children; activities that would have been impossible just a short time ago.



Noor's husband is a poor man who uses his cart to transport items for others to provide for his family. According to HTAC staff member, Akmal Ghafari, a computer instructor at Roshan High School (in Laghman Province), who HTAC selected to manage our first CHAMPS project, there is no way this family would have ever been able to afford a prosthetic for Noor.

But thanks to the school children of the Glenelg Country School in Ellicott City, Maryland (a CHAMPS exchange 'sister' school with Roshan), students there raised enough money to provide Noor and other landmine survivors with prosthetics and rehabilitation care.

On June 26, 2009, Akmal took Noor to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Hospital in Jalalabad for her final appointment to be fitted with her new prosthetic. MLI CHAMPS Director, Kimberly McCasland asked Akmal how he felt when he saw Noor walking with her new leg. His response: "Too happy... that never was in my life before. Thank you very much for that you prepare the helping way. I am so happy that you chose me for this enjoyable job."

And how did Noor feel about receiving her new prosthetic and having the ability to walk again? "You have to say thank you to Kimberly and the children, I am thankful for your help." These simple words of appreciation come from a woman whose life has been changed and is now easier because of this program and the unique partnership between HTAC and MLI.

You can learn more about our landmine education program and our partnership with MLI by going to our website: www.htac.org and clicking on 'Educational Programs' from our home page. For more information about wonderful work of the Marshall Legacy Institute, please visit their website at: www.marshall-legacy.org

New Peace Education Grant Program to Benefit 3,700 Students in 7 Schools

HTAC took another important step in advancing peace education efforts in Afghanistan by securing a major grant from War Child Holland (WCH). The grant, which runs from October, 2009 through December, 2010 will benefit approximately 3,700 middle school students at 7 schools in the underserved Paghman District, just west of Kabul. WCH is part of an international network of organizations whose mission is to empower and help children who have been affected by war.



Because HTAC believes in continually evaluating and improving our programs and services, this latest effort will utilize both educational approaches and tools that have been successful in the past as well as several new approaches that we believe will make peace education even more effective and sustainable for the children in these communities. We'll continue to establish peace rooms as centers for learning and related peace activities in each of the 7 schools and provide comprehensive teacher training for approximately 28 teachers selected to teach and role-model peace education principles for these students. HTAC's 'Journey of Peace' storybooks (developed by our partners at McMasters Center for Peace Studies in Hamilton, Ontario that help children deal with the emotional trauma associated with violence), are already in use at 12 other schools this year and will be provided to all 3,700 students and school libraries. Other continuing activities will include having children work with puppets (to help act out their anxieties, fears, and aggression), and provide theater productions with peace themes.

What's New? HTAC and our partners at McMasters Center for Peace Studies have learned that a child's home environment plays a crucial role in how Afghan children are able to cope with the emotional trauma caused by exposure to violence. In fact, a recent McMasters study concluded that between 60% - 70% of Afghan children demonstrate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder that impedes their ability to learn and develop normally.

That is why the new project will include involving parents in supporting peace education for their enrolled children. Teachers will be trained to orient parents about the program and provide guidance in how parents can better communicate with children who are experiencing such trauma. Parental peace guides will be provided as well, offering tips on how parents can establish a safe, nurturing home environment that will help their children feel more comfortable expressing their feelings with a trusted adult. HTAC and WCH will also collaborate in producing a behavioral management model for all teachers to follow when interfacing with children. Afghanistan, unfortunately, remains a country where many teachers still follow decades old corporal punishment practices. The model we hope to create will be a guide for new teaching standards in the classroom that focus on positive methods of motivating and reinforcing the learning process. HTAC also plans to develop a peace teaching model that can be used by Afghanistan's Ministry of Education in expanding peace education into other region of the country.



We at HTAC are very excited about this new opportunity in bringing peace education to 7 new schools and we will keep our readers up to date on our progress.

Saving Lives, A Proud Tradition Since 1993

While HTAC's primary focus continues to be the delivery of quality education to Afghan girls and boys, we have never forgotten the critical, on-going need to provide humanitarian aid and emergency relief to children and their families. Our tradition of providing this assistance goes all the way back to 1993 when our Executive Director and founder, Suraya Sadeed, visited the refugee camps during the height of the Afghan civil war and discovered the deplorable living conditions of displaced Afghan children. Since then, HTAC has provided critical aid to over 2 million Afghans in the form of: medicinal aid, blankets, shoes, apparel, cooking, heating, and school supplies.

Working with one of our primary international shipping partners, AmeriCares, HTAC (in 2009), has already distributed thousands of tons of medical-related supplies and equipment to hospitals and clinics in the Kabul area as well as into underserved areas of the country through our domestic partners such as the Ministry of Public Health's hospitals, Afghan Health and Development Services (AHDS), and Emergency Clinics.

What kinds of supplies and equipment are getting into the hands of doctors, nurses, midwives, and other health professionals? A recently arrived AmeriCares shipment contained 7,277 pounds of anesthetics, muscle relaxers, vitamins, several examination tables, hygiene kits, syringes, examination gloves, sanitizing wipes, baby bottles, booties, baby clothing, and even stuffed animals for pediatric patients.

Too often we hear only about the violence and death in Afghanistan. Granted, the casualties of war are real and troubling, but one of the most under-reported stories in the last several years has been the steady improvement in the delivery of medical aid and the access to medical/health services for Afghan families; especially women and children. While Afghanistan's health and medical standards continue to rank among the poorest in the world, many critical health indicators are steadily rising. In the last five years, infant mortality rates have dropped from 165 per to 129 per 1,000 births; a 21.8% improvement. Mortality rates for children under 5 have dropped from 257 to 191 per 1,000; a 25.7% improvement.



Mother and child; just two of the millions of reasons why we exist.

In the vastly under-served province of Urozgan, AHDS reports even more dramatic progress. In the last year alone, vaccines for pregnant women have increased from 38% to 50% and tuberculosis detection rates have improved from just 9% to 30%.

HTAC is proud of its association with organizations like AmeriCares and Afghan Health and Development Services as well as other long-term aid partners like The Mennonite Central Committee who, along with our donors, make it possible for us to facilitate the shipment and distribution of this critical aid to the courageous men, women and children of Afghanistan.

Spotlight On Our Students

In our June edition of “The Voice of Innocence”, we announced the publication of our latest ‘Read Afghanistan’ bi-lingual storybook – ‘A Rose for Leyla’ – which is being used to promote reading at 12 of our schools as well as becoming a centerpiece for cultural exchange projects between several Afghan and American ‘sister’ schools.

Many of our readers and schools here in the U.S. were intrigued to learn that **Storai Stanekzai**, the 11th grader at Rokhshana Girls School in Kabul, provided the magnificent illustrations for this book. Storai was recently recognized by HTAC for her contribution by HTAC Country Director, Mr. Yousuf M. Jabarkhail.



When told that her illustrations are being viewed by over 2,400 students in Afghanistan and (by fall of this year), several thousand American students, Storai expressed delight and gratitude that she was given the opportunity to contribute to the storybook. Storai’s illustrations are not only beautiful, but (according to many Afghans who have seen them) represent a true depiction of everyday Afghan life.

HTAC is proud to recognize students like Storai who are a testament to Afghan girls and young women and now have hope for a brighter future through education. We are thankful to our donors and HTAC partners like Moms Against Poverty and Girls Learn International who help support our ‘Read Afghanistan’ program, allowing us to make a positive impact on improving literacy in Afghanistan; one child at a time.

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- \$25 Provides a month of essential school supplies to 5 students.
 - \$50 Purchase desks and chairs for one student.
 - \$75 Pays for one teacher’s monthly stipend.
 - \$100 Pays for planting a school garden (students will help maintain).
 - \$250 Pays for printing & distribution of 15 bi-lingual storybooks.
 - \$500 Helps support a school’s Peace Room activities for one year.
 - \$1000 Pays for a school’s cultural exchange program for one year.
 - Other \$_____ General operations support
- Become an outreach volunteer
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