



What a difference it makes, working in a challenging environment, when assistance comes from all directions. We report here on finishing touches to the Shin Kalay (SK) school supported by a generous donation from the Afghan Appeal Fund in London; on promised support beyond staffing and school upkeep from the Afghan Ministry of Education and the Village Development Program; and on a likely opportunity for the newly-graduated women physicians to advance their clinical training in India.

Dr. Mohammad Khan Kharoti recently returned from 3 ½ months in Helmand Province, working there in the heat of summer while students were absent from the school. The school is busier than ever this fall with 1,660 boys in 12 grades and a growing enrollment of over 1,100 girls in grades 1-9. The government has kept their promise of 32 teachers for 18 classrooms of boys in the morning, and 14 classrooms of girls in the afternoon. With the addition of four female teachers, older girls are streaming in to enroll.

### Indoor work

The auditorium now has a carpeted stage and chairs for over 100 people, supplies coming almost entirely from an earlier project, the Advanced Education Center in Lashkar Gah. Already, the space has been used for a celebration honoring the district's best teachers, with awards handed out by the school's director, who is also the District Director of Education.



Auditorium

The library has two rooms: one for books in Pashtu, one for books in English. The Pashtu books were provided by the Deputy Minister of Education in Kabul, Dr. Shinwari, and by President Ghani's Administrative Assistant, Mr. Ghazanfar, who also provided a list of translated international books on a wide range of subjects. Mohammad purchased the recommended books in Kabul. The English books, aimed at elementary and middle school students, mostly came from Germany. Miraculously, the old GVS bus survived the round-trip to Kabul for transporting the Pashtu books.



Library

For 41 of the 58 classrooms, Mohammad purchased high-quality Persian carpets from two stores in Lashkar Gah. Several rolls were transported in a large truck to SK where they were cut to size in the school's courtyard. Enrollment is too high to accommodate chairs or desks in most of the classrooms. Many of them now have a new metal blackboard mounted on one wall.



Cutting carpet in the courtyard

### Outdoor construction

Work was focused on painting the window frames, doors, and banisters and on plastering the entire outer second floor wall. Some of the painting was done by local men, but the more detailed wood work required experts from Lashkar Gah. For the banisters, painters were hoisted in a front loader on a tractor from which they could spray paint. The north side of the school abuts on an alfalfa field owned by a widow whose husband and oldest son died in the war. Mohammad secured her permission to erect the scaffolding for plastering by purchasing the alfalfa and letting others harvest it for free as the project went on for a month.



Plastering second floor classrooms

### Update on former SK female students

Employment search for the three new female physicians is underway, in a competitive environment with lots of real and false certificates given out and with a proliferation of pharmacies selling drugs to anyone. Security for female health workers in rural clinics creates another hiring challenge. In the meantime, the three physicians, and a fourth local woman, all with teaching certificates, have been hired to teach girls at the school in SK. Two of the physicians are engaged to marry but their marriages are not imminent, and Mohammad has the assurance from all parents that they will be allowed to pursue their careers and to travel to India for further training if possible.

A physician at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, who speaks Dari and for several years ran a community health program in northeast Afghanistan, has offered to make his family their temporary family. The young women all speak Dari as well. They would stay in a secure female-only dorm at the college and would be supervised by experienced female. Afghan Appeal made the connections and Mr. Ghazanfar has promised to help with passports and visas.

A fourth female physician-in-training is doing well near the end of her fourth year at Boost University in Lashkar Gah. Four girls enrolled in the School of Leadership, Afghanistan (SOLA) in Kabul have the challenge of travel back and forth from Helmand by bus during summer and Eid-celebration breaks. They were also sent home during an epidemic of malaria and typhoid fever. Usually they travel with the GVS Administrator, Ayub Kharoti, but not always. All are progressing in a high-level curriculum not yet available in SK. Two have advanced to the 7th grade, one is repeating 6th grade for which she had been inadequately prepared, and one is a new 6th grader. In the company of each other, all love having this opportunity in Kabul. We have funding to cover their tuition through March of the 2018-2019 school year. We hope to have sponsors for continuing the tuition support.

### Our next priority

The Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. Shinwari, has indicated that with funds designated for rural schools he will make provision of an English teacher and a computer teacher a high priority for SK. And a local committee in SK (made up of elders, head teacher, and principal, and chaired by Ayub Kharoti) has been promised funds from the Village Development Program. Two ground-floor, gender-separate rooms are wired for computers and could be used simultaneously with separate entrances from either side of the school. The committee has decided to make solar panels for electric lighting and computers their priority for a large portion of the funds, with the remainder going to other community needs. Clearly, educated children and the school itself have become a source of pride and recognition for the village.

### From the eyes of a former aid worker

Ashley Jackson, a Research Associate with the Overseas Development Institute in London, visited the school while completing interviews across much of Afghanistan for her publication *Life under the Taliban shadow government*. In an email to Caroline Richards, founder of Afghan Appeal, she commented, "As ex-aid worker, I tend to be a bit jaded. But what you've collectively managed to achieve is, quite literally, a miracle. We showed up unannounced, and the boys' side of the school was absolutely packed. Later in my visit, I peeked over at the girls' side as well - which I really didn't even expect to be operating under such conditions. Much to my amazement, the girls were trickling in for the second shift. I've never been in such a well-kept school in rural Afghanistan."



Girls and female teachers

### Other small budget goals

We hope to raise funds for an annual sports budget of \$1,000 for girls participating in intramural basketball and volleyball and boys traveling beyond SK for soccer and cricket; a one-time budget of \$1,000 to help small schools in the district with needs identified by their staff; and \$2,000 for a high-pressure washer for the latrines and a new printer for the teachers' office.

Thank you for any, and all, past support of this challenging project in southern Afghanistan.

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