



GVS president, Dr. Mohammad Khan Kharoti returned to Portland from Afghanistan in September more energized than ever, having accomplished so much in one summer.

### Land acquisition and wall construction

With construction of the two-story school complete and a daily attendance of over 1,600 boys and 1,100 girls, we set our sights on acquiring land for an athletic field. Mohammad estimated a budget necessary for the purchase of two jeribs (~ one acre) of land and for the construction of a privacy wall which would enable both boys and girls to use the field. With two large donations and numerous smaller ones we met the predicted cost and Mohammad headed to Helmand in June with high hopes.

Through a month and a half of challenges, he finally acquired the two-jerib property just north of the school and the privacy wall is already completed. It was not a simple purchase. Three brothers, all involved in the negotiations, owned the land but two of them were working at some distance from the village, so there were travel delays. Up to fifty male adults were involved in community jirgas (meetings), held in the school's courtyard, to discuss the transactions. A neighbor to the north of the brothers also wanted to buy the land and the price rose to almost double its local value. After more than a month of negotiations, Mohammad had to move on to other options. He found a two-jerib plot near, but not adjacent, to the school, but the cost exceeded our budget. So, he sold three jeribs of his own farmland and, with the proceeds, purchased that plot.



Construction of privacy wall and gate

So, the school now has newly walled land just to the north, with an entrance gate directly from the girls' side of the school and another gate for the boys from the street side. Mohammad has the nearby farmland on which he will plant peanuts and other crops just as he had done on the land he sold. But he took the precaution of acquiring signatures of agreement from all adjacent land-owners, which means in the future he can sell the land to the government for expansion of the current school or even for construction of a women's college – his next big dream! But first we must prepare the athletic field with grass for cricket and football (soccer). In the meantime, the neighbor to the north of the brothers now has Mohammad-the-educator to the south and Mohammad-the-farmer right across the street to the west. Cultural genius at work!



Jirga to discuss land purchase and education issues

When Mohammad began building a privacy wall around the land, the brothers realized they had lost a potential deal and offered to sell their land at local price. But their northern neighbor then wanted half of it. Mohammad would have to trade land to acquire the whole plot. He had invested time and money in starting the wall on the new land so was reluctant to trade it. Instead, he purchased some good farmland, at some distance from the school, for a price within our budget, and traded it for the brothers' prize piece. Then he stopped wall construction on the first new property until the wall on the brothers' land was completed.



Boys cricket team with trophy from tournament

### Other important tasks

In his "spare time," Mohammad **supervised** cement laying in the school's courtyard; **selected** a midwife student for Friends of Afghanistan who support her tuition at Ahmad Shah Baba Institute; had an old printer **repaired** for the teachers and **purchased** a good new one in Kabul; **purchased** a podium, microphone, speakers, and an Afghan flag for the auditorium as requested by the schools' Director; **interviewed, hired,** and **paid** the temporary salary of an English teacher for students and teaching staff at the school, then **sat in on classes** to insure he was doing a good job; **met with** the provincial Director of Education to **get salaries** for the contract teachers; **spoke at** the graduation ceremony held at the school with the

President of Helmand University, the Provincial Director of Education, and parliamentary members in attendance as speakers themselves; and **simply survived** temperatures up to 117 °F as he multitasked his way through the summer. On return home through London, he **spoke** to the British troops who had been assigned to a NATO post in Shin Kalay.



Teaching staff and students attending English class

### Former female students energize our school

**Something extraordinary** happened at the school this past winter. It was an event that crystalized our image of progress in this part of rural Afghanistan. The four girls enrolled at SOLA (School of Leadership Afghanistan) in Kabul had left home with fears of living in the big city and knowing only each other. The oldest student, who had been in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in Shin Kalay, was placed in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade based on her testing. One started in 6<sup>th</sup> grade rather than 7<sup>th</sup>. One failed and had to repeat 6<sup>th</sup> grade. But what progress they have made! Two of them won the citizenship award for their grade level last year. And when they came home for winter break between school years, without adult encouragement or supervision, they started teaching Grades 1-6 at their former school.



The Helmand Director of Education was so impressed that he asked for them to be salaried. Young girls' attendance rose, and the school's Director invited them to return on all breaks from their own schooling. For the village, the four students have modeled the importance of educating girls. The value of girls and women in the eyes of boys and men, and the self-images of girls and women may have taken a big leap forward. Their teaching certainly meant a lot to SOLA's founder and director, Shabana Basij-Rasikh. [Her blog post](#) expresses the importance of this most clearly. While reading it, please keep in mind that these students have several more years ahead of them at SOLA and will need tuition assistance.

### Additional news from other former students

Since Mohammad started this project in 2001, many students have completed secondary school and moved on to higher education and a variety of professions. Dr. Anara has a full-time job in Marjah, and Drs. Fatima and Noor Nama work for an NGO teaching hygiene and nutrition and giving vaccinations in Nad-i-Ali District. Ghutay will graduate from medical school in a year and is planning to attend midwife school this year and next, for hands-on training in women's health care. A graduate of our former Advanced Education Center (AEC) in Lashkar Gah has also enrolled in medical school, making her the fifth local woman to pursue this profession. Two male graduates of our AEC are directors of midwife institutes. Many have trained for the military and police. Five have returned to teach in Shin Kalay. Some have returned to farming.

### Progress made in bringing electricity

The school may soon have electricity. Engineers have assessed the panel site and electricity demands, while the Village Development Project committee, headed by GVS Administrator (Ayub), has designated solar panels for lights and for the computer labs as the next village project. The final step is in the hands of the Bank of Asia which provides 90% of the funding. GVS must provide the rest (~ \$4,000).



Mohammad speaks in the auditorium, brightened by only natural light

### A major support coming to an end

Thank you for helping us provide a model for assisting an area of the world in need. The youth are their future and they are already leading the way. It is they and their children who will solve completely the conflicts our generation has created. The Afghan Appeal Fund in London, which has provided most of our funding for construction, is dissolving at the end of this year and their major benefactor, Sir Michael Uren, who was knighted for his philanthropy, has passed away at age 95. We appreciate the enormous support the AAF has provided us and we will miss the frequent phone and email chatter across the Atlantic. But, GVS is alive and well and we hope to have your own continued support.

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