



Season's greetings to our Green Village Schools supporters. GVS president, Dr. Mohammad Khan Kharoti, returned to Portland from Afghanistan in late November and had much to report on the progress of education in Helmand Province.

Shin Kalay

Construction continues with the arrival of more funds from UK-based Afghan Appeal in September. Fourteen classrooms are finished and filled with students throughout the day, two more are under construction on the girls' side of the school, and the plan is to bring the total to 24 classrooms as funding permits. Eight latrines with flush toilets for the girls, a storage room, and a guards' room are nearing completion. A second 80-meter well has been completed on the girls' side. Mohammad reports that the well and latrines at the school have provided an opportunity for community education on the importance of potable water and hygiene. Many villagers saw toilets for the first time.

Enrollment at the school has quickly reached 1,160 students. There are more boys than girls. Since the school's destruction in 2008, boys have continued classes in the temporary mud brick classrooms set up by the main mosque while teachers have reached fewer girls in private homes and their educations have been compromised. Tight scheduling now accommodates 790 boys (grades 1-11 in 18 class sessions) and 370 girls (grades 1-4 in 8 class sessions). Classes for all four grades of the girls and for grades 1-5 of the boys are held in the morning. Classes for boys in grades 6-11 are held in the afternoon when they can utilize classrooms on both sides of the campus.



The most crowded classrooms are girls' 1st grade (215 split into 3 rooms) and boys' 3rd grade (65 in 1 classroom). One wonders if 24 classrooms will be enough as girls advance through to 12 grades. Mohammad reports that the Chairman of the Ministry of Education (MOE) for Helmand Province visited the school and was so impressed that he has increased the number of teachers hired by his ministry to teach in Shin Kalay from seven to seventeen. The agreement from the beginning has been that teacher hiring and payment would be managed by the community and the MOE. We want this project to be entirely self sustaining as soon as possible.



The supervisor of the reconstruction has found ways to reduce costs without compromising quality. The classrooms all abut against the exterior wall of the compound so each room requires only three additional walls, reducing the material needs by about a third (rooms are not square). Bricks (~100,000) were recovered from the rubble of the old school. Rebar extends above the roof level of rooms in anticipation of second story building if and when funding permits.

Advanced Education Center (AEC)

On September 17th, entrance exams, for the third year of the program in English and computers, were held for boys and girls in their separate government schools in Lashkar Gah. Initially about 300 boys applied but only 58 girls. The top 100 boys and all of the girls were admitted. The teaching staff takes attendance each morning. A boy is considered tardy if he is not in the classroom when the instructor arrives. A boy with three tardy days in one month is asked to leave the program, to be replaced by a student on a waiting list created at the time of the entrance exams. About 10-15 boys have been replaced. The staff has been asked to be more flexible with the girls because they have more reasons beyond their control for being late and there are still spaces available for girls. Their enrollment has, though, risen to 93 and none has dropped out. Fifteen more girls have taken the entrance exam and it is anticipated enrollment will reach 100.

Funding for the AEC has become a real challenge. The last portion of the grant for the 2012/2013 school year, which ended in June, was not received until September so the rent for the building went unpaid through the summer. We were awarded a Cost Extension of the same grant for the 2013/2014 school year but, as of December 18th, we have not received a disbursement of funds. The Cost Extension was about 10% less than the original grant so the GVS Board of Directors added \$8,000 from its general fund to keep teacher and other staff salaries at last year's level and cover some maintenance costs while foregoing salaries for Mohammad (only while in Afghanistan) and PeacePal's Sarah Wilkinson (US administrator) altogether. The GVS donor funds are being used to temporize as we still await the first disbursement of the Cost Extension funds.

AEC Graduates Follow-up

Ra'ana, a graduate of the AEC and of the Teachers College in Lashkar Gah, is now working in the AEC main office. She helps female students with school concerns and has been compiling employment and continuing education information on the AEC female graduates.

It is difficult to follow female graduates because of privacy concerns among the parents about their daughters. In fact the greatest numbers of graduates are still in secondary school in Lashkar Gah. The largest number of women continuing post-secondary education is in the healthcare field: four in medical school, one in nursing, one in physical therapy, two in midwifery school, and five in other healthcare fields. The next largest area of study is teaching with seven students at the Teacher Training College. Three students are studying computer science in Malaysia. And one is going to law school. Among those already employed are six teaching at the local secondary school, one teaching at the Teacher Training College, one working as a nurse, and Ra'ana who is employed at the AEC.

Post-Secondary Tuition Support

As mentioned in previous newsletters, three former students of our first school in Shin Kalay are studying medicine in Lashkar Gah and they have successfully completed the first quarter exams for year two of medical school. Their tuition is fully supported for five years by the LBW Trust in Australia. We are asked if the students have committed to working in Helmand when they complete their training. Of course there are no guarantees, but their courses are taught in their native Pashtu, and their families and hearts are in the Nad-i-Ali District of Helmand. We believe it is unlikely that they will practice outside the province they call home. When they return home on breaks, their friends are asking to be their patients.

Two AEC students have gone on to midwifery school in Lashkar Gah. Dr. Allison Burton (Eureka, California) and her physician friends have helped with their tuition for one year while another donor has committed to cover another year. Four other midwife students (non-AEC) heard about the tuition assistance and asked for help. All six were interviewed to assess need and all received financial help from the donors. We have set up a separate scholarship fund selection on our website and encourage anyone interested in really helping women of Helmand enter the workforce to [make a donation](#).

Sarkar

The money is in the bank and permits are in order but construction has been delayed for more than year. While the land for the school is owned by the government, it is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture. Several individuals in the village claimed the land is for their private use for crops and pressed the village Commandant to have the police halt the project before it began. One of them asked Mohammad for money to reverse their decision. He has never given in to such requests. Now the land has been transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Education. The Chairman of the Education ministry has directed the Commandant of Sarkar to direct the police to allow construction.



Mohammad surveys the site of the new school in Sarkar.

Engineers from the MOE have laid out the lines for the privacy wall and construction began in November. However, the engineers have insisted on foundation dimensions that require more cement than Mohammad thinks is necessary and the funds committed by Dr. Bob Fuselier (Los Alamos, New Mexico) may not complete the entire wall. He is still raising money for latrines and a well, while the MOE has committed to build necessary classrooms and to hire and pay the teachers. Meanwhile, 70-80 students are attending classes on the ground outdoors and are taught by three student teachers from the Teachers College. So Dr. Fuselier's commitment to the school has already brought a large measure of success. The MOE had never intended to support a school in this village.

Mohammad in London and Germany

Mohammad was invited by Melanie Bradley of Afghan Appeal to speak in London and Germany on his return from Afghanistan in November. He and Melanie presented lectures on Afghan history and culture and on his work in Helmand to students of British military families attending three schools near Hannover and Hamburg. A video of one class shows that the students now better understand the importance of investing in education in Afghanistan and the success we have had at the AEC in Lashkar Gah and in Shin Kalay where Afghan Appeal has quite literally raised the new school from the rubble of the old.

While in London, Mohammad did a live televised interview with the BBC in English and a taped interview in Pashtu for delayed broadcast. He received good immediate feedback from contacts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, especially regarding his very informative discussion about the Taliban. The interviewer, Zeinab Badawi, was especially pleased, commenting to Caroline Richards of Afghan Appeal, "He was superb, fluent, passionate, genuine, a charming, engaging man ... he came over wonderfully ... and yes, he gave a different perspective on the Taliban ... it was a very extensive interview." Since his arrival home in Portland, Mohammad did another interview for Voice of America, during which there were a number of call-ins to the program from the Middle East. The graying Dr. Kharoti has become a real ambassador for education in Helmand!