



## Project helps bring together students from two different worlds

Posted at: 06/11/2012 10:49 PM

Updated at: 06/12/2012 7:26 PM

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It is a project that is helping bring together students from two very different worlds; one in war ravaged Afghanistan and the other right here in New Mexico. And because of the project, hundreds of Afghans are getting the education they never dreamed possible.

Blake Batten is part of an Albuquerque organization that helps fund and support Green Village Schools' Advanced Education Center, an Afghan initiative.

But his organization is just one of three. He said most people who learn about the program are surprised or apprehensive of the partnership.

"Sometimes you get questions like, why are you trying to work there? That's just a completely hopeless situation." Batten said he could not disagree more with that thinking, and said his latest trip to Helmand Province in Afghanistan is only proof of progress.

The main reason for Batten's trip was to attend graduation ceremonies for the school. More than 200 boys and girls, men and women, became certified in English and computer literacy and will now go on to further their education and enter the workforce.

For Batten, the ceremonies were personal. He not only does office work to help keep the school running, he has also developed strong relationships with the students, which until this trip, were based strictly on letters and Skype.

During his visit, Batten also spent time with elders from a nearby village.

He said they had one message. "They told me, take this message back to the American people, that we're tired of war and what we want is education for our children."

Education is key in Helmand and New Mexico. One of the organizations involved leads a pen pal program out of Los Alamos High School. The letters initially act as an English lesson, but Batten said the take away on both sides is far more valuable.

"This is the first time youth over there have really had the opportunity to directly connect with youth here in the U.S....ultimately, what we want here, is just for youth to try and understand one another and go beyond the typical images they might see in the media."

> For more information, visit [www.greenvillageschools.org](http://www.greenvillageschools.org)