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Spotlight: Bringing hope to Afghanistan

Mohammad Khan Kharoti, a Nuclear Medicine employee on the Interstate Campus, was born to a nomadic Afghani family and couldn't read until he was 12 years old. He went on to become a physician in Afghanistan, but had to flee to America during the Soviet occupation. Since 1989, he has worked for Kaiser Permanente.

Dreaming of helping other Afghanis (only 30% of men and 15% of women know how to read and write), he founded Green Village Schools (GVS). It is establishing schools in Afghanistan that offer boys and girls a basic education in reading and writing in both Pashtu and English, as well as in math, history, and science. Its board meets regularly on the Interstate Campus and includes both KP staff and members.

The schools he helped found have proved wildly popular. In August, Mohammad, his 26-year-old daughter Sultana, and his 19-year-old son Yama traveled to Afghanistan. Their mission was to help build four new classrooms for the girls' school and a perimeter wall. Sultana and Yama, who were returning to their homeland for the first time in seventeen years, also went to teach English and mathematics, respectively.

Upon the Kharotis' arrival at the school, the need for more classrooms was apparent immediately. The school had added grades five and six for the boys and grades three and four for the girls. The expected summer enrollment for the school had been 150 students, but 400 attended and autumn enrollment is estimated to be over 500. The school had only three small classrooms for the boys, and the girls were being taught in Mohammad Khan's brother's guestroom. Because of the lack of space, children, primarily girls, were being turned away at the doors every morning.

One of the first objectives was to gather the elders of the village and talk about the school. Unanimously, the elders, including the local mullah, stated their unconditional support for the school and its attendees. Mohammad was told that the schools had become a beacon of hope for the locals and that people from villages near and far were trying to arrange for their children to attend.

Construction of the new classrooms began right away. Thirty local villagers, along with Mohammad and his brother Habib, were on-site six days a week. They also built a perimeter wall for security and privacy, allaying the concerns of parents who were reluctant to send their daughters to school if they were visible to men passing by.



Afghani girls study in a school founded by Kaiser Permanente employee Mohammad Khan Kharoti.

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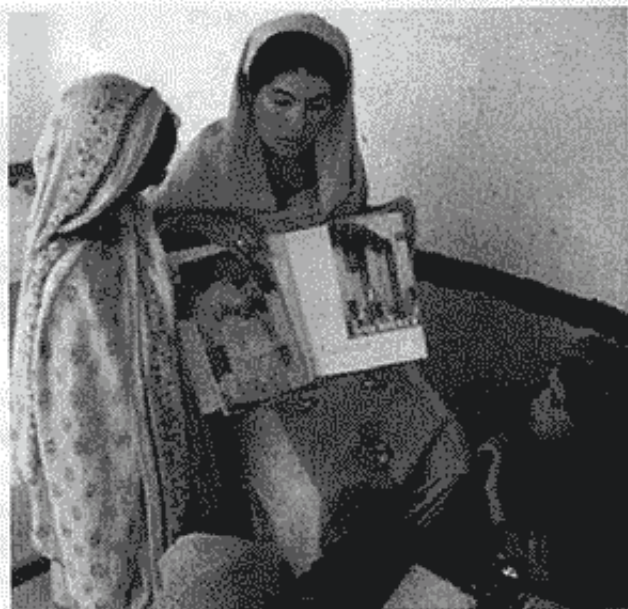
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Sultana Kharoti shows Afghani girls photos of the World Trade Center bombing. With her father, Kaiser Permanente employee, Mohammad Khan Kharoti, Sultana went to Afghanistan to help expand a school Mohammad founded.

Sultana and Yama spent from two to seven hours a day teaching. Yama took a group of 15 students under his wing. His rigorous curriculum began with simple arithmetic and, in four weeks, ended with his students solving basic algebra problems. Nine-year-old Abdullah, son of the local mullah, finished as the top student.

Sultana taught after-school voluntary English classes to both boys and girls. She had 16 girls and eight boys in these classes. Her students were so eager to learn that they would stay long after class was over to listen to Sultana. She challenged their paradigms about morals, hygiene, and etiquette. She also taught a one-day dental

hygiene class to all four hundred students. Afterwards, she handed out toothbrushes, toothpaste, and floss donated by the Pre-Dental Student Organization at Portland State University.

In the early afternoon, Sultana usually taught a general science class about subjects ranging from anatomy to earth science. In her free time, she spoke with local women about the advantages of smaller families and cautiously introduced ideas of birth control. The average family in the village has about 13 children.

Sultana's conversations with her students were helpful to them in an unexpected way. In a society where women have been denied education for decades, many of the girls truly believed they could not perform well in school. Her role model gave them self-confidence and many began to believe that they could do anything they put their minds to.

When the Kharotis departed, many of the students and teachers at the school were in tears. They asked Mohammad Khan to relay their message of appreciation to the GVS donors and Americans in general.

For more information on Green Village Schools, go to www.GreenVillageSchools.org.

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