



2013 is off to a good start. There is much to report from Lashkar Gah, Shin Kalay, Sarkar, and now from Portland and Vancouver as well, while GVS challenges and successes mount in rural Afghanistan.

### TEDx talk

Last fall, we received an invitation for Mohammad Khan Kharoti to participate in the TEDxConcordiaUPortland event on March 23. His talk, *The Challenge of Educating Girls in Rural Afghanistan*, was well received by an audience of 700. You can watch the video of the talk from our website at: <http://goo.gl/UnzoC>.



Mohammad speaking on stage

During the event intermissions, attendees were invited to participate in activities with the speakers. At the Green Village Schools table over a hundred people wrote letters (gender matched) to girls and boys in our Advanced Education Center in Lashkar Gah. The letters were delivered to the students by Mohammad when he returned to Afghanistan in early April.



GVS letter writing station at TEDxConcordiaUPortland

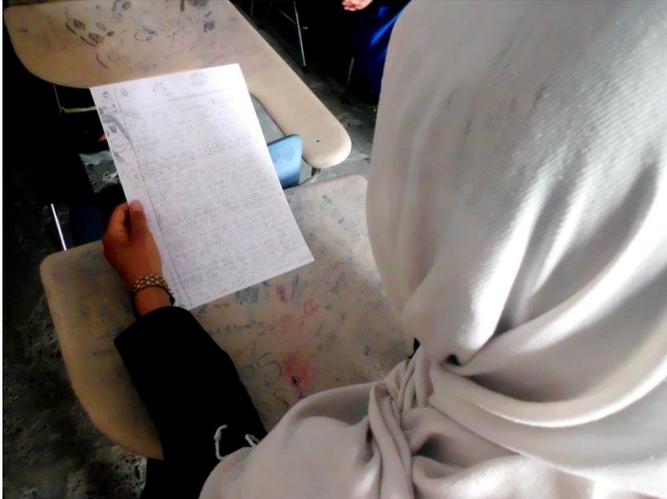
### AEC update

We are pleased to report on the success of many students who received certificates from the Advanced Education Center during its first year of operation, 2011-2012. A number of girls have gone on to higher education in Helmand (3 in medical school, 2 in midwifery, 1 in law and political science, and 2 in business administration), in Kabul (1 in economics), and internationally (3 studying computer science in Malaysia). A larger number (18) have found employment as high school ESL teachers in Lashkar Gah. Among the boys with AEC certificates, 20 are teaching ESL and two are employed by Mercy Corps as computer instructors, all in Lashkar Gah. One young man is an ESL teacher and administrator at the Ahmad Shah Baba Medical Institute in Lashkar Gah, and another is an ESL and computer teacher at the Benawa English Language Center in southern Helmand.

The 2012-2013 AEC students have faced increasing challenges staying in school. Students are asked to leave the program if they are tardy or absent on more than three occasions and this has had to be enforced ten times for boys. Two more were dropped for poor performance. Most boys who left on their own gave no reason, but some had work conflicts or moved. For girls the challenges have been more complex: family problems (including permission), no male family members to accompany them to the center, family relocated, marriage (only 1), conflict with jobs outside the home, and tertiary education elsewhere. The murder of two girls in the city earlier in the year very likely contributed to family ambivalence about girls' education outside the local high school. (Note that it is challenges like these to which the title of Mohammad's TEDx talk refers.) Nonetheless, we still have 74 boys and 62 girls enrolled at the AEC, hungry to continue learning and on target for graduating in May with marketable English language and computer literacy skills.

### New letter exchange partner

We have been working with Dr. Beverly Questad this year at Skyview High School in Vancouver, Washington with assistance from Sarah Wilkinson of PeacePal in New Mexico. Four female students in Beverly's Model UN class have hand-written, scanned and then emailed letters to girls at the AEC. Subsequently they have sent English grammar instructions and explanations of a number of phrases in their letters. Girls in both countries are now exchanging Pashto and English lessons via YouTube videos, according to Mohammad. Other schools in Oregon and Washington have expressed interest in letter exchanges and Mohammad will ask public schools in Lashkar Gah if they would like to participate on the Afghan end of the exchanges. These projects would be modeled after the PeacePal program that has been exchanging letters with Afghan students in our AEC project and with schools in Nepal and five sub-Saharan African countries for several years.



AEC student reading a letter from Skyview High School

### Shin Kalay progress

Afghan Appeal in London has made two more very generous donations for the rebuilding project in Shin Kalay. Seven classrooms are complete except for wall plastering, wiring, and placement of windows and doors. The external construction of another seven classrooms is nearly complete. Any money remaining after all interior work is complete may support initial work on two small gender separate computer labs. In the meantime the first seven classrooms are already in use even without desks and blackboards.



Girls arrived at the rebuilt school to continue their education.

The Ministry of Education will be responsible for teacher salaries. The communal committees responsible for security, problem solving, and purchasing, and the work supervisor in charge of rotating work groups and overseeing the construction have kept the project on target and the community invested and focused. When Mohammad took the Helmand Chairman of Education and his engineer to visit the construction site, the Chairman was amazed that GVS had spent only US\$76,000 on a privacy wall, a well, and 7 nearly completed classrooms, in

contrast to government construction projects which have required US\$500,000 for an eight-room school. Mohammad will stop in London, on his return from Afghanistan in June, to meet with the Afghan Appeal board and help with further fundraising.



Helmand Chairman of Education (center), his engineer (left) and Mohammad visit the construction site.

### Update on Sarkar

Bob Fuselier, founder of the Afghan Sister Village Project in Los Alamos, New Mexico raised \$18,000 for school construction in Sarkar. Previous permission was given by the government for the project solicited by the elders of the village. The first priorities will be a privacy wall and a well, and then classrooms as funding permits. Meanwhile Mohammad will also seek funds from the Ministry of Education for classrooms and the MOE will be responsible for teacher salaries. Mohammad would like to have GVS oversight of the construction to ensure good quality at a reasonable price rather than involving contractors and sub-contractors as often happens with government projects financed with foreign funds. As in Shin Kalay, community committees will have a major role.

### Medical Students

The three female medical students who started private medical school last summer, have successfully completed two semesters of basic science courses. Mohammad spoke at length with Noor Nama after she returned to Lashkar Gah from a wedding celebration of childhood friends in Shin Kalay. She, Anara and Fatima were surrounded in their home village by former classmates who reminisced about the days before the school was destroyed. One friend commented, "You're lucky your fathers supported you in going farther in school. We wish ours had done the same." Another said, "If I get sick, you will be my doctor. Please don't charge an office fee." The collective plea was, "Please, please study hard. This is a golden opportunity for you. Maybe someday we can be in school again too, as adults." This was a reminder to the medical students how lucky they are and Noor Nama expressed great thanks to those who've been supporting them. GVS is especially grateful to the LBW Trust in Australia for paying the students' full tuition.