



The 2013 – 2014 school year has seen one major project come to an end and another continue to grow. With American presence in Afghanistan winding down, funding for the Advanced Education Center (AEC) in Lashkar Gah is no longer available and, without another large funding source, we closed the center soon after graduation was held at the end of May. Meanwhile, Afghan Appeal in London has continued to support construction of the school in Shin Kalay and our efforts will be focused there for the rest of this year.

### Advanced Education Center

What did we accomplish with the AEC in the three years of its existence? It seems only a short time ago that GVS President, Mohammad Khan Kharoti and his nephew Ayub were loading 30 computers onto a bus in Kabul for transport to a rental house in Lashkar Gah, with plans to offer training in English and computers to 25 boys and 25 girls. During that inaugural 2011-2012 academic year, the center instead accommodated 112 boys, 100 girls, and 40 public school teachers. The students were predominantly from Lashkar Gah public schools (15% came from surrounding districts) and, while the students were largely Pashtun (72%), a wide variety of minority ethnic groups were represented, including Hazarah, Tajik, Baloch, Turkmen, Uzbek and others. The center was founded by GVS in cooperation with PeacePal (Albuquerque) and Afghan Sister Village Project (Los Alamos) and was made possible by a grant of \$410,000.

With a second grant of \$49,800 for the 2012-2013 academic year GVS and PeacePal were able to maintain enrollment at 200 students with the teachers and administrator (Ayub) accepting smaller salaries, the rent on the building being reduced, and the center having all of the equipment from the previous grant. In our application for a Cost Extension to the grant for 2013-2014, we anticipated some students would return for more advanced training. Accordingly, we changed the curriculum to accommodate students in four levels of English and one level of computers. We received a Cost Extension of \$45,150 and GVS added funds from private donors in an effort to augment salaries and keep non-teaching staff at the previous salary level. In mid-September 300 boys took the entrance exams but only 58 girls participated. The top 100 boys and all of the girls were admitted. During the year, attrition of male students (about 15 at one point) was easily replaced from a waiting list while female enrollment eventually rose to 98 students.

What were they taught, how did they do, and what meaning did graduation have? English lessons, taught by Afghans with university training, relied on the student-centered TESOL approach but this year we added a textbook with seven levels of lessons, each with reading, writing, listening, and speaking exercises which the students could keep for further reference. Beginning classes started with level one while intermediate classes began later on in the series. Computer lessons covered operating systems, typing, web browsing, MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, and basic hardware. Because it is important not to give out meaningless certificates to students who do not

perform, each certificate had a grade indicated and they were not given to all students. At the end of May, graduation certificates were awarded to 42 girls and 60 boys in the Computer classes, and 38 girls and 47 boys in the English classes. Certainly the students in the upper half of the class were taking full advantage of the teaching offered and will be able to utilize the skills at home, at work, and in further advanced studies. In addition, Sarah Wilkinson (PeacePal) continued her scanned letter exchanges between students at the AEC and students in New Mexico and Connecticut, utilizing the AEC for international cultural growth on both sides of the world.



AEC female student gives graduation speech in English.

In the three years of its existence, the AEC has received considerable attention in Afghanistan on Helmand-wide TV and radio broadcasts, and internationally on BBC, on Voice of America, and on YouTube through a [TEDx talk](#) done in Portland, Oregon by Mohammad. Yet closure of this popular center was inevitable as funding disappeared. We will continue to use the equipment and supplies in the school in Shin Kalay where chairs and desks are already in use and the computers are in storage. Office supplies are in storage in Lashkar Gah awaiting a reopening of the center should funding materialize.

### Shin Kalay

Meanwhile the school in Shin Kalay is prospering and growing, with further generous funding from Afghan Appeal and the plans nearly completed now for a 24-classroom school and two computer labs. We have been building separate boys' and girls' sections of classrooms, computer labs, wells, and latrines so that health, privacy, and gender separation issues are not a concern despite the concentration of students. The Afghan government officially owns the school and its Ministry of Education (MOE) pays the teachers' salaries. This year the staff expanded to 29 to accommodate 4 grades of girls and 11 grades of boys. Enrollment is now beyond the 1,200 students of the original school and will continue to grow as the number of grades expands to 12 for both boys and girls.

The MOE is so thoroughly impressed with the school that they have approached GVS with a proposal to use one of the classrooms for a rural teachers college. They propose to enroll girls from Nad-i-Ali district, paying each \$60 per month to attend. With computers from the AEC, the new computer lab would offer a unique opportunity for the government to include computer training in its curriculum for teachers in training. Our bus might also be of value in transport of students who would come from other parts of the district. The MOE would add additional staff for the college. While computers are not part of the government curriculum for the primary and secondary schools of Helmand, we anticipate that they will be in the future. Perhaps the school in Shin Kalay will become a model.



Computer lab construction

The new Shin Kalay school has been used by the community for regular parent-teacher meetings and for the school graduation exercises attended by parents, MOE officials, district project advisers, and elders from surrounding villages. The mud brick classrooms adjacent to the central mosque, which were also built with assistance from Afghan Appeal as a temporary school, have been used by the community for meetings, during the last election for voting, and for lodging of travelers in need of food and shelter. All in all, school structures benefit the community in a number of ways.



Boys' graduation at Shin Kalay school



Overcrowded girls classroom

### Post-Secondary Tuition Support

We continue to support girls with post-secondary school scholarships, the current focus being on health related studies. Three medical students in their 3rd year of study still have assistance from the LBW Trust in Australia while four more medical students enrolled at Wade Helmand (private college) receive assistance for their tuition as GVS donations permit. We have supported six midwife students at the Amad Shah Baba midwife program. One did not complete the course. The other five have graduated and await their required government certificates before they can begin work in local hospitals or clinics.

### Your donation is much needed NOW!

You may be asking the question "How can I help if the AEC is closed and Afghan Appeal is supporting construction in Shin Kalay?" Ayub is still on salary overseeing the construction and administering scholarships. Four medical students are in need of tuition assistance and more female students might pursue post-secondary education if funding is available. The computers in Shin Kalay are three years old and some are in need of replacement. Mohammad thinks that science tutoring for seniors in Shin Kalay would help them with university entrance exams at a cost of about \$5,000 a year for three teachers. GVS pays for Mohammad's transportation to and from Afghanistan and expenses in the country once a year to supervise, work through inevitable administrative roadblocks to our progress, and minimize security issues by maintaining good relationships with all who come in contact with the schools. While Afghan Appeal's latest generous donation will be their last, Mohammad thinks another \$15,000 will be needed to complete a storage room and a teachers' office on the second floor. In the meantime, teachers and storage occupy two rooms that are meant to be classrooms.

As US presence winds down in Afghanistan, large funding opportunities are becoming scarce. GVS will depend on individual donations more than ever. We hope you will continue to support education projects so vital to the country's transition to a stable democracy.

Donate to GVS at:  
<http://www.greenvillageschools.org/donate>