



GVS President Dr. Mohammad Khan Kharoti wore many hats this spring and summer in Afghanistan while directing construction, planning graduation ceremonies, visiting Herat and Jalalabad in search of solar panels, and meeting with a very important person in Kabul. He returned home in June worn out but pleased with the direction in which both Shin Kalay and Afghanistan are moving.

School construction continues

GVS received a generous donation from The Michael Uren Foundation through Afghan Appeal in London. The donor wanted to help us “finish the school.” But with an increasing hunger for education among students and their parents and with the addition of another class level for girls each year, the school will not be “finished” for some time. The focus this spring was a stairway to the second floor, water reservoir covers, a canteen for students to purchase school supplies, carpets for all classrooms, and a 300m²-library. Several hundred books have arrived from an English school in Germany and await the completion of shelving planned for this fall. The library space will be available for school and community meetings pending construction of stairways and walkways.



Mohammad (top right) standing outside the newly finished library

Another kind of education

Another focus this spring involved an activity at school which we take for granted here and prefer not to talk about, one that is not easily managed in rural Afghanistan. That would be the use of latrines. The topic is too important to side-step. Very few students have squatting latrines at home and it had come to our attention that students were not using them properly at school and most of the teachers were not using them at all. Concerned about a major public health problem, we hired a local man to clean and to monitor latrine use. He organized groups of students to assist in monitoring and

training. Mohammad did some instruction in the classrooms as well. Two latrines were walled off and locked for staff use only. These simple solutions seem to have worked well and the employee now has a permanent position. With some success, Mohammad has also encouraged community members to install latrines in their homes, convincing them of the health benefits and fewer medical expenses caused by poor sanitation.

Hard choices

The courtyard and the buildings now have a different appearance. With funding from the Afghan government’s Security in Key Areas (SIKA) program, a basketball court was set up on the girls’ side and a volleyball court on the boys’ side. The library sits atop the computer labs near the second story administration offices and the all important privacy wall has also been raised, adding to the school’s vertical expansion. We have remaining funds from Afghan Appeal but must make an immediate choice between solar panels for the computer labs and additional classrooms for girls. We have decided in favor of the girls for the short term. With enrollment nearing 1,200 for boys and 600 for girls, classrooms are crowded. In the meantime, the computer labs are used for exams and other non-teaching functions.



Boys took their exams in a classroom built as a computer lab

Graduation this June marked the first passage of 12th grade boys but was also important for girls who have now reached the 6th grade level and had their own separate ceremony. In attendance at the ceremony for boys were elders of Shin Kalay, school principals and mullahs from the district, and Ministry of Education (MOE) representatives. A TV station from Lashkar Gah covered the event, filming mullahs speaking about the value of the school and the importance of protecting it, and Mohammad speaking out for open enrollment and the importance of girls’ education, quality of all education, and hygiene. Students recited their own poetries. The Governor of Helmand could not attend but

upon seeing the coverage on Helmand TV, he insisted that the producers have it televised nationally, which it was. The ceremony took place in the school's courtyard so Shin Kalay and the school got some national exposure.



Boys' graduation

English course addition

Over the summer, even as painting of the full interior of the school takes place, 60 boys and 27 teachers began a 14-month advanced English class taught in Shin Kalay by four teachers from the Wahidi English Language and Computer Center in Lashkar Gah. Three of the Afghan teachers were trained in Pakistan; the fourth is a graduate of our former Advanced Education Center (AEC). Significantly, parents are paying half of the cost, GVS the rest. The English preparation will be important for future computer classes. Girls are not included yet because the Wahidi Center has no female teachers and parents are not willing to pay for their daughters' lessons anyway. GVS is willing to take on the full cost for girls as encouragement and Mohammad will address the community this fall about allowing male teachers from the Wahidi Center to teach their daughters. This is still a challenge in rural Helmand.



Painting inside the classrooms

Meeting between old friends

Since the closure of the AEC, we have brought the computers to Shin Kalay for the already completed computer labs. The operation of the labs, one for boys, one for girls, awaits the purchasing of solar panels and installation of

internet service (funding source to be determined). With this in mind Mohammad spent a lot of time on the road, driving first to Herat near the Iran border where he met with staff of the Crystal Solar company for cost estimates, next to Jalalabad near the Pakistan border to meet with staff of the Nangahar Rotary Club for their advice on solar panels, and lastly to Kabul for pricing some new computers.

While in Kabul, Mohammad waited for a full week to meet with a very busy President Ashraf Ghani. He and Mohammad had known each other briefly in school in Lebanon and Mohammad was greeted "nomad to nomad" (Ghani's words) by a man recognized as one of the world's leading intellectuals. This President has given considerable thought to education. He is hoping to remove school construction from the MOE and to free up funds from other sources for building schools. He had heard good things about our school and especially appreciates our intention to provide open enrollment to people of all political persuasions, equal training for girls, and access to computer literacy.



Girls at Shin Kalay school

It is becoming clear that Mohammad's own national visibility is a real asset to the school and perhaps to education in rural Afghanistan in general. Locally, even religious leaders are swayed. Mohammad had a conversation with one of the mullahs after the graduation ceremony. He described his memories of herding cattle in Shin Kalay as a boy. A translation of the mullah's reply would be, "Now you are doing something more important, leading the children of the village to educational pastures."

Thank you for your continued support of our work in Helmand, whether our immediate focus is on education, construction, or hygiene.

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