



The Voice of Innocence

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF HELP THE AFGHAN CHILDREN (HTAC)

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Working Hard in 2010

2010 marks HTAC's 17th year of serving the children of Afghanistan, and despite the on-going challenges facing Afghanistan and its courageous people, we are excited about this new year and some unique opportunities in making a significant impact in the lives of thousands of deserving Afghan girls and boys. Here's a quick recap of what we're working on in 2010.

Peace Education – Thanks to the incredible work of our educational professionals, our staff, and partners, HTAC is rapidly becoming a primary source for delivering quality peace education for Afghan school children.



Suraya Sadeed, Founder and Executive Director

In 2009 we expanded and improved our innovative curriculum (including the successful launch of our new 'Journey of Peace' storybooks), into 12 schools and 3 provinces. After securing two new grants, we are extending our reach significantly in 2010. Plans call for training an estimated 1,300 peace education teachers in 36 schools, and deliver this program to an unprecedented number of students (over 44,000), in 4 provinces. The success of our peace education initiative has won the support of Afghanistan's Ministry of Education as a key educational program that should be expanded into other regions of the country, but most-importantly, we've earned the respect and trust of local school officials, community leaders, and parents who are seeing the positive results peace education has with their children.

Teacher Training – HTAC's most ambitious teacher training program in our history is in full swing as we've enrolled and begun training approximately 2,400 teachers in Farah Province, located in Southwestern Afghanistan. Supported by The Ministry of Education and The World Bank, the program is designed to dramatically enhance the quality of instruction at all Farah Province primary, middle and high schools by improving teaching competencies in 11 critical skill areas. HTAC was one of the first organizations working in Afghanistan to introduce specific standards of teaching excellence and many of these teachers will be ready to apply these new skills with the start of the new school year, later this month.

Other important developments in 2010 include the following initiatives,

Model Schools – We've adding a new model school (Gul Pacha Ulfat Boys High School), in Laghman Province that is also participating in our landmine education program. HTAC is now supporting 9 model schools in 3 provinces.

Literacy Program – Thanks to the supporters from the **Captain Matthew Freeman Memorial Fund** and **Moms Against Poverty**, we will be able to print and distribute sufficient copies of our "Read Afghanistan" storybooks for 9 school libraries and classroom use for over 2,000 students. These books have been instrumental in improving reading levels since they were first introduced in 2003.

Cultural Exchange Program – With the installation of the internet in a third HTAC school, we can expand our program to include 'real time' communication 'exchanges' between our Afghan schools and selected 'sister' schools in the United States. Our cultural exchange and educational programs have benefited hundreds of students while promoting global citizenship between our countries.

Computer Education, Environmental Education and Landmine Education Programs – Individual donor and partner support will allow HTAC to continue providing these highly-regarded, life-changing programs to an estimated 8,000 students at 12 schools in 2010.

During these very difficult economic times, all of us at HTAC extend our appreciation to those of you who have found a way to help support the work we do. We appreciate your show of confidence and we will do our best in 2010 to continue to earn your trust.

Peace Education – Letters from the Heart



HTAC is proud to share the following testimonials on how our peace education program is impacting Afghan children. Two letters come from the parents of enrolled children; the third is from one of our peace education teachers.

Dear Teacher, Salaam,

*We are very thankful to the peace education program that affected a lot for our daughter. **Anahita Jan** (their daughter), never took part in chores before joining the peace class. She never put her clothes in the right place and never helped her sisters and mother. But after joining the peace education program she has changed completely. She now participates in chores around the house and knows how to keep everything clean and in its own place. We are happy for the lessons that our daughter learned in class. She applies those lessons learned in her daily life and the program helped her learn very interesting things.*

Regards,

Anahita's parents

Hello to the peace education teacher,

I am very thankful to the peace education program organizers that has had a lot of positive effects on my son and we are very happy that such a program is running in the school. We are very happy to have this program and the things he has learned from peace class and are shared with the entire family. He is applying the lessons of showing respect, cooperating, and not fighting in daily life and it is having a positive effect. We think this program can help us have a good and peaceful family.

Regards,

Omar's father

Letter submitted by Ms. Maliha; peace education teacher at Abdullah Bin-Omar Middle School

I was going home one day in a mini-bus. On the way, a woman from the area got onto the bus and sat next to me. After a while, she started talking about how her daughter is benefiting from the peace program at their school. She said her daughter never took part in chores around the house before. She was rude and she didn't have respect for elders. After joining the peace program, she is now very cooperative and shows proper respect for elders. This mother said her daughter is very respectful and calm when talking, and even arguing (her point). When she finished telling me this wonderful news, I introduced myself, letting her know I was her daughter's teacher and was so delighted to hear about her progress at home. The woman was very surprised to meet me and said she was so happy about her daughter, and thanked me.

Afghan Students Score High Marks on Computer Exams

Until a few years ago, Afghanistan's information technology jobs were filled almost entirely by foreigners. Now that is beginning to change, thanks to thousands of young Afghans eager to develop computer skills and provide much-needed home-grown human resources to repair the country's devastated infrastructure.

HTAC is proud to be playing an important role in this recovery. As the first organization to introduce computer education into Afghanistan's public schools, 27,149 students (56% of whom have been girls), have enrolled in our classes and each year, a high percentage of these students graduating from our program demonstrate their ability to successfully master key computer skills.

Out of the 7,365 students who enrolled in our class in 2009, 97.7% successfully passed our rigorous final exams, which were given this past December. Students were tested on their ability to prepare and edit word documents, create Excel spread sheets, develop power point presentations, (and for 12th graders), demonstrate their skill in navigating and using the internet. Amazingly, some of our girls and boys schools reported that 100% of their students successfully passed their exams.

What does computer education mean for our students? For graduating seniors, many will be able to secure good computer-related jobs in government, public service, or with private companies. Many others will use their newly-acquired skills in helping them enter a college or university. Still others will be able to use a computer to assist their parents or spouse in a family-run business. For virtually all of them, it means a life-changing skill and hope for the future.

Landmine Education Program is Saving Lives and Changing Attitudes

HTAC's CHAMPS (Children Against Mines Program) is not only providing life-saving education to thousands of Afghan children and their families, but is beginning to change perceptions in how Afghans view Americans, for the better.

Back in August, 2008, HTAC and our partners, **The Marshall Legacy Institute**, launched the first CHAMPS program in Afghanistan's Laghman Province. Working directly with Afghan high school students, teachers, and local community leaders, CHAMPS educates children as well as families about the dangers of unexploded land mines in and around their local villages. The program also provides meaningful exchanges (via the internet), between participating Afghan students with a 'sister' school in the United States. American students get to learn about the program and help raise funds in their local community that pay for prosthetics and rehabilitative care for several landmine survivors each year. In our September edition of 'The Voice of Innocence' we shared the amazing story of **Noor**, a 20-year-old woman, a landmine survivor whose life improved dramatically because of the CHAMPS program.

We now share two new stories that demonstrate how this program is actually saving lives and changing (earlier negative perceptions) many Afghans in this area had about Americans. A CHAMPS team of students from Roshan High School went to a nearby village and taught children and adults **Mine Risk Education (MRE)**, which they had learned earlier in class. A few months later, the village elder thanked the school's program manager for "saving our lives". Several boys who had attended the MRE session found a suspicious object in a field, and because of their training, ran back to warn the village. What they found was a missile launcher with loaded missiles! Authorities were called and they extracted the dangerous, unexploded objects. Their actions saved untold numbers of people.



CHAMPS Afghan students wearing hats from their American sister school

Several months before the program was introduced to this region, an unfortunate incident occurred where US forces

had spotted and chased several Taliban members into a nearby village. A fight ensued where the Taliban were killed, but also several innocent villagers. The local villagers (including many of the children), thought the Americans ‘hated them’ and had killed the villagers on purpose. Then came CHAMPS. Wheelchairs, walking canes, and orthotic socks were delivered to those who had been injured from the fighting through monies raised by students at their American ‘sister’ school. Afghan students also began weekly internet video conferences with their American counterparts, a key component of our global citizenship exchange program. As these video conferences continued, attitudes about the American students began to change. A number of Afghan students told their project manager “The Americans don’t hate us; they love us. They want to help us and they want to know us better.” This positive message was communicated by the students to their parents, who then told other community members.

For the people in this local community, these small, but positive steps are helping to break down deeply rooted misperceptions between Afghans and Americans and if continued, can very well lead to bigger breakthroughs in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between our countries. To learn more about this program, visit our website – www.htac.org – and to learn more about the Marshall Legacy Institute, visit their website at: www.marshall-legacy.org

Spotlight on Our Staff – Meet Valentina Tagin

Peace Education & Cultural Exchange Coordinator



When HTAC recently received funding from **War Child Holland**, an international non-governmental organization, to implement our **peace education program** at seven new schools in Afghanistan, one of our first priorities was to recruit a project coordinator; someone with strong organizational and communication skills, experience working in Afghanistan’s educational system, and one who could effectively interface with local school officials, teachers, master trainers, members of the community as well as partner agencies.

After interviewing a number of well-qualified candidates, we decided to promote one of our high-performing computer instructors, **Ms. Valentina Tagin**, to the position. Miss Tagin, who has taught computer education at two HTAC-supported high schools, has a B.A. in Dari Literature from Kabul University, has received language and computer certifications from several institutes, and speaks three languages- Dari, English, and Pashtu.

In addition to her peace education duties, Ms. Tagin will also coordinate HTAC’s cultural exchange program that links several of our Afghan schools with sister schools in the West. We are delighted to have Valentina Tagin as a new member of HTAC’s Afghanistan management team.

♥♥♥ You Can Make a Difference ♥♥♥

- \$25 Provides a month of essential school supplies to 5 students.
- \$100 Pays for planting a school garden, which students will help maintain.
- \$500 Helps support a school’s Peace Room activities for one year.
- \$1000 Pays for a school’s cultural exchange program for one year.
- Other \$ _____ General operations support
 - Become an outreach volunteer
 - Help sponsor a school or education program



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