



CHAMPS Landmine education program is saving lives and changing perceptions



Since August, 2008, HTAC and our partners, **The Marshall Legacy Institute**, have been implementing our highly successful CHAMPS (Children Against Mines Program), in Afghanistan's Laghman Province. Working directly with Afghan high school students, the program educates children about the dangers of unexploded land mines, promotes global citizenship between Afghan and American students, and raises money to support and rehabilitate landmine survivors.

These efforts are now having a profound, positive impact for the children and families in these communities. One CHAMPS team 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.



Students receiving landmine education in the field

CHAMPS has begun changing perceptions many Afghan youths have about Americans as well. 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. Understandably, the local villagers (including 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."

For the children in these local communities, these small, but positive steps are helping to break down deeply rooted misperceptions between Afghan and American children (and if continued), can very well lead to bigger breakthroughs in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between our countries.