

“Read Afghanistan” Storybooks Touch Hearts & Improve Literacy

For several years now, we’ve shared with our readers the impact our “Read Afghanistan” bi-lingual illustrated storybooks have had in our schools. In 2008 alone, 750 students from 5 of our schools enrolled in this innovative program (that uses originally-written stories in both Dari and English) to not only reinforce positive values, but also to improve children’s reading comprehension; a critical problem throughout Afghanistan. Last year, 80% of these students demonstrated significant improvement in their native language and 50% were able to read the English version of the stories; a remarkable accomplishment, since 50% of boys and 80% of girls (nationwide), are illiterate.



Our latest storybook, “A Rose for Leyla”, written by HTAC Board member (and former peace corps teacher in Afghanistan), Ms. Frances Connell, is a delightful, poignant tale of a young girl’s dream to become a doctor and is being made available to approximately 2,400 students at 12 schools in 2009. What makes this book especially unique, however, are the illustrations. They were created by **Storai Stanekzai**, an 11th grade student in Kabul. Storai’s beautiful illustrations give this book an amazingly realistic flavor of everyday Afghan life.

The power of great storytelling and the desire to help others can go a long way in fostering global citizenship. 7,000 miles from Afghanistan in Westfield New Jersey, students at Roosevelt Intermediate School (an HTAC-Girls Learn International partner), have been so inspired by “A Rose for Leyla”, that they have written their own *Leyla book* which we plan to translate and share with Afghan students.

In addition to soon being able to view “A Rose for Leyla” on our website, individuals can make a donation of \$50 to receive a copy of this book. For more information, contact our office at 703 848-0407 or email Stephen Perlman at – Stephen@htac.org.

♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥ You Can Make a Difference ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥

- \$25 Provides a month of essential school supplies to 5 students.
- \$50 Purchase desks and chairs for one student.
- \$75 Pays for one teacher’s monthly stipend.
- \$100 Pays for planting a school garden (students will help maintain).
- \$250 Pays for printing & distribution of 15 bi-lingual storybooks.
- \$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 educational program
- Help your community middle & high schools learn about Afghanistan

WAYS TO GIVE:

On Line: www.htac.org/donate

By Mail: **Help the Afghan Children**
3900 Jermantown Road, Suite 300, Fairfax, VA 22030, USA

A non-profit organization, 501-C-3, Tax ID: 54-1695838



bbb.org/charity



The Voice of Innocence

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF HELP THE AFGHAN CHILDREN (HTAC)

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My Trip to Afghanistan

It’s been a custom of mine to visit Afghanistan every spring and this year was no exception. The cold winter temperatures were gone and I was greeted with brisk, but pleasant weather. Snow still draped the mountains surrounding Kabul and countryside. The advent of Spring also marked the beginning of the new Afghan year and the start of school, and it’s always a special time to visit our schools, talk with principals, teachers, and students and see first-hand how well our programs are being implemented.

My hectic two week schedule prevented me from visiting all the places I had wanted to, but I was extremely pleased with the accomplishments we have already made this year. HTAC’s teacher training program in Farah Province (the largest such effort in our 16-year history), is making steady progress. Approximately 2,400 teachers there have been selected for training and we have established a training headquarters and hired a manager.

I was disappointed in not being able to visit Roshan High School (in Laghman Province) where HTAC had initiated our first landmine education program along with our partners at the Marshall Legacy Institute. However, I was pleased to learn that we provided wheelchairs to 35 disabled men, women, boys and girls (victims of landmine accidents), and our educational awareness program there continues to flourish.



One of our landmine education classes

I was especially gratified to see the launch of our new, advanced peace education program and observed a series of training workshops, conducted by Mary-Jo Land (from the McMasters Center for Peace Studies in Toronto), for several dozen peace instructors. Most impressive was the utilization of HTAC’s new “Journey of Peace” storybooks. These books will provide our teachers with a new tool in better helping children cope with the emotional trauma of witnessing and/or experiencing violence in their lives, and begin the healing process. This year alone, 1,500 boys and girls are enrolled in our program. We were greatly pleased to learn that Afghanistan’s Ministry of Education expressed an interest in piloting peace education in one entire province, provided we can secure additional funding.



Some of the participants and guests of our workshops

In our on-going effort to enhance the capacities of our Afghan staff, I conducted a continuous improvement workshop for staff officers who are responsible for overseeing our programs and general operations.

Before I left for the airport and my return trip from Kabul, I was asked to visit one of our model schools, Rokhshana Girls School because I was told that a high school student there had a special gift for me. Obviously, this invitation made me quite curious since I had no idea what kind of gift this girl might have; perhaps a beautiful scarf or maybe a wonderful poem she had written. After all, many Afghan children are known for writing beautiful poetry. But when 11th grader Storai Stanekzai gave me a handful of illustrations and said “*These are for your new storybook*”, It touched my heart. Unbeknownst to

me, Storai had learned that our staff was working on a new original storybook “*A Rose for Leyla*” for our “Read Afghanistan” literacy program and she had volunteered to prepare some illustrations. I was stunned at how beautiful her illustrations were; so perfect for this story. I thanked Storai and told her that her illustrations would be seen, not only by thousands of Afghan students at all our schools, but by children everywhere. Just seeing the proud look on her face made my entire trip worthwhile.

Suraya Sadeed
Suraya Sadeed
Executive Director

How Does Quality Education Really Impact Afghan Children?

We Are Making a Difference

This spring, 14,075 Afghan girls and boys from 12 schools in 3 provinces are reaping the benefits of quality education. Over 8,000 alone are enrolled in our computer education program; another 1,500 in our peace and environmental education courses, and about 2,400 are taking advantage of our literacy program. But what does it really mean to *receive a quality education in Afghanistan*? Here at HTAC, we strive to give every one of our students the following experience:



Students on their way to school in Kabul

A safe, secure, and nurturing learning environment: It's hard for many people living in the West to appreciate what we so often take for granted, but (for too many Afghan children), the lack of safety and security is a harsh reality. While no one can guarantee 100% safety and security *anywhere in Afghanistan*, HTAC takes special care to establish model schools and deliver our programs in those regions of the country that have a history of being safe. In addition, we work in areas where local communities are strongly supportive of education; especially education for girls; and where the community takes personal ownership for their children's educational welfare. As a result, children who enroll in our schools feel safe, secure, and learn from caring teachers.

Highly-qualified teachers: It cannot be overstated that teachers are the key to improving the quality of education in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the great majority of today's teachers lack the necessary education and training to effectively transfer knowledge onto children. At HTAC, every one of our teachers is required to pass a rigorous teacher training program in which they must demonstrate mastery of 11 critical teaching competencies before they are allowed to teach independently. In addition, our program involves co-teaching experiences (with a teacher trainer), individual coaching, and a long-term development plan to ensure that our teachers *continually strive to improve their skills and abilities*. That means, students at our schools are receiving instruction from some of the best and most-qualified teachers in Afghanistan.

Critical knowledge and life skills: While all children who attend school receive a standard curriculum established by the Ministry of Education, HTAC has always focused on delivering innovative learning programs that will provide children with the critical knowledge and skills they will need to become *empowered and productive young men and women*. That is why we focus on programs that address existing or emerging (but unmet) needs *i.e. teaching children about peace, or taking care of their environment* as well as providing them with marketable skills *i.e. computer education*.

The gift of education is nothing less than priceless. For every child in our care, it's an opportunity to touch and change that child's life forever and with your continued support, HTAC will keep the torch of knowledge shining brightly for all 14,075 of our students this year, and for the thousands of future students in years to come.

SAVE THE DATE

September 10th Event to Celebrate Peace & Literacy in Afghanistan



Your contributions will help over 14,000 other students this year.

Help the Afghan Children will hold its major fundraising event of the year on **Thursday, September 10, 2009** from 6:30 – 9:30pm at the **Crowne Plaza, Tysons Corner** (1960 Chain Bridge Road, McLean, Virginia). The Crowne Plaza's website is: www.cptysonscorner.com

The theme for this event – ***Celebrating Peace & Literacy in Afghanistan*** – will showcase important milestones and accomplishments HTAC has achieved in laying the groundwork for an innovative approach to education Afghan children about peace as well as efforts that have improved literacy levels for thousands of girls and boys at our schools.

Friends, supporters and guests will be treated to a wonderful evening of traditional Afghan food, informative presentations, and opportunities to see first-hand, how we are making a difference in the lives of Afghan children. Highlights include:

- *A slide show presentation of HTAC's programs and services with a special focus on peace and literacy.*
- *An interactive presentations and discussions*
- *Video greetings and messages from special guests and Afghan children who have benefited from our programs.*
- *Opportunities to donate (and purchase) HTAC original peace and literacy storybooks, beautiful photography books on Afghanistan's landmarks and artifacts, as well as Afghan handicrafts and postcards.*

The Crowne Plaza will offer attendees a discounted room rate for those who wish to stay overnight.

This event will be limited to 100 guests and reservations are required. To make a reservation and/or learn more about our fundraiser, please contact our office at: 703 848-0407.