



**Program Fact Sheet  
Afghan Friends Network  
April 2012**

**Khurasan Learning Centers, Women's Literacy & Scholarship Programs**

**Website:** [www.afghanfriends.net](http://www.afghanfriends.net)

**Mission:** Afghan Friends Network delivers sustainable programs in education and cultural exchange that promote self-sufficiency and empower Afghans, in particular, women and girls.

**About the Organization:** Founded in 2002, Afghan Friends Network (AFN) works to improve the lives of Afghan women and children through education. An all-volunteer, grass-roots organization, AFN was founded after 9/11 by a San Francisco woman, Carol Ruth Silver, and Afghan-born Humaira Ghilzai, a former executive at Sun Microsystems, Inc. AFN efficiently provides support directly to the Afghan people who need it most, setting a high standard for fiscal responsibility and program excellence



AFN works in rural Afghanistan, an impoverished country which has been devastated by 32 years of civil and international war. Forty percent of Afghans are estimated to live below the poverty line. Afghanistan has long had one of the poorest education records in the world and under the Taliban from 1996 to 2001, the educational situation deteriorated even more as schools were destroyed, books burned, and women and girls banned from attending school.

DFW's project is focused in the province of Ghazni, some 60 miles south of Kabul, the capital. AFN operates one Khurasa Learning Center in the Ghanzi City Center and one in Qalai Qadam, in the countryside. In addition to extreme poverty, lack of funds for schools, teachers and supplies, and a weak infrastructure with often no roads and safe water.

Ghazni must cope with security concerns because Taliban and other extremist forces have a strong presence in Ghanzi and shut down or threatened schools and girls' education here and across Afghanistan. War has also left a staggering number of widows, who are largely unable to generate sources of income due to illiteracy. Afghan women are also often marginalized and isolated by being barred from

holding jobs, having legal rights, owning property, or leaving their homes alone. In Kabul alone, from several hundred thousand to two million widows try to eke out a living in extreme poverty, some as beggars. Education and income are critical to address these needs.

### **The Project:**

Our Dining for Women \$45,000 support will help fund two years of proven girls' and women's education in Ghazni through three educational programs that serve to empower marginalized girls and women:

1. Khurasan Learning Centers: providing 4<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade education in Math, Science, and English to 500 girls annually to prepare them for college exams and empower them to be wage-earners and leaders.
2. Women's Literacy and Vocational Training Program (located at the KLCs): which provides a three-year course to 80 widows and adult women. They learn language, Math and handiwork skills, which empower these women to generate income to buy rice, flour, oil, sugar and other household items to support their families. It also increases their civic engagement;
3. University Scholarship Program which awards annually \$360 scholarships to 16 graduates of the Khurasan Learning Centers and covers the costs of transportation, supplies and food.

Ghazni residents have advocated to have the two Khurasan Learning Centers (KLCs) open six days per week, 11 months out of the year for their daughters and women. The Centers are managed by the former Director of Education in Ghazni, Ms. Fatema Mushtaq, and staffed entirely by Afghans.

### **Khurasan Learning Centers and Women's Literacy Program**

- ❖ Both programs operate in two locations in Ghazni province; one in City Center and one in Qalai Qadam. The KLCs are open every day for five hours per day, 2 ½ hours in the morning and 2 ½ in the afternoon to supplement the limited school schedule.
- ❖ Each KLC has four teachers, all of whom are highly regarded in the community. The women's program operates six days per week for two hours each day.
- ❖ All curriculum is aligned with Ministry of Education standards and students are assigned to classes based on an entrance exam to assess proficiency. In this way, we can take a 15-year old girl who is at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade level in Math and move her to 12<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency step-by-step in preparation for her Concord college exams.

### **University Scholarship Program**

- ❖ Funding is secured for four years at a time so each girl is guaranteed full support through her term in college.
- ❖ Scholarship students are selected on the basis of Concord exam scores, financial need, commitment to education use of degrees, familial support – critical for sustainability - and acceptance into university. Girls would not be able to afford



the costs of transportation, supplies and food without the scholarships.

❖ **Women’s Leadership in AFN Programs**

Women are the decision makers in the KLCs, Women’s Program and Scholarship Program. Making up over 2/3 of the KLC staff and all of the executive positions, women started the KLCs and continue to organize the programs in collaboration with male teachers. There is a democratic atmosphere, and girls are empowered to make presentations and advocate for their education, such as expressing their desire for more hands-on curriculum or learning about women’s rights. Female staff also serve as leaders and role models to students.

**Why we love this program**

We love this program because it gets right to the heart of Afghan women and girls’ struggle for literacy, empowerment, and the right to work and go to school. DFW will fund this organization over two years, giving AFN secured funding to sustain its educational programs. AFN will receive half of the DFW funds initially, provide DFW with a progress report after a year, and then the remaining funds will be disbursed to support a second year of funding. Through the Khurasan Learning Centers, not only are the girls educated in Math, Science and English, but they prepare for college exams and if they pass, they may be accepted for free education at a university in Kabul. Prior to the first Learning Center opening, only one girl in Ghazni had passed the exams. Four years later, 85 girls passed. DFW will provide four-year scholarships to 16 girls who would not otherwise be able to attend university. DFW applauds the story of Fahima, one of AFN’s upcoming graduates who will return to her village with nursing skills. Her entire village now turns out to greet her, calling her “Doctor” Fahima. DFW will be at the forefront of deep, cultural transformation such as this in Ghazni.

**History of the region<sup>i</sup>**

Official Name: [Islamic Republic of Afghanistan](#)

Area: 652,230 sq. km. (251,827 sq. mi.); slightly smaller than Texas.

Population (July 2009 est.): 28.396 million. Main ethnic groups: Pashtun (41%), Tajik (27%), Hazara (9%), Uzbek (9%), Turkmen, Aimaq, Baluch, Nuristani, Kizilbash.

Religions: Sunni Muslim 80%, Shi’a Muslim 19%, other 1%.

Main languages: Dari (Afghan Farsi), Pashto.

Afghanistan, often called the crossroads of Central Asia, has had a turbulent history. It has suffered invasion and occupation numerous times over the last 2000 years.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Afghanistan suffered from continued ethnic and political strife. In 1979, the Soviet Union intervened militarily on behalf of one political faction but faced armed opposition until Soviet troops were withdrawn ten years later under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. The Taliban rose to power in the mid-1990s in reaction to the anarchy and warlords that arose after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Many Taliban had been educated in madrassas in Pakistan and were largely from rural southern Pashtun backgrounds. By the end of 1998, the Taliban occupied about 90% of the country, imposing their extreme interpretation of Islam--based upon the rural Pashtun tribal code--on the entire country and committed massive human rights violations, particularly directed against women and girls. Under the Taliban, women and girls were denied the right to education and schools were often destroyed. Many were harmed or killed when they tried to go to school.

From the mid-1990s the Taliban provided sanctuary to Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden and al-Qaeda acknowledged their responsibility for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, and, the United States led a multi-lateral operation to root out Al Qaeda and depose the Taliban. President Barack Obama has announced that the American combat role in Afghanistan will end in 2014.

The effects of this violent history on the population have been devastating. Decades of war resulted in an entire generation of uneducated citizens, weak infrastructure, security concerns with the Taliban, who are active in Ghazni, and little funding for school buildings, supplies and transportation. Millions of Afghans have fled the country and those that remain often suffer greatly. Afghanistan has one of the highest mortality rates in the world: one in five children dies before the age of five and one out of every eight Afghan women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth each year. Life expectancy is 49 years for both men and women. The literacy rate is 28.1% (male 43%, female 12%). Life expectancy (2011 est.) is 49 years. GDP per capita (2009 est.) is \$900.

### **Life challenges / urgent response**

Though much progress has been made, female literacy is still a shocking ten percent in Afghanistan. That means that nine out of ten women cannot write their own name or even read it.

Currently, more than 80 percent of Afghan females lack basic access to education and 40 percent are below the poverty line. Girls in Ghazni need more hours of instruction in Math, Science and English to pursue higher education and compete for the few University positions available. The year before AFN opened its first KLC, only one girl in the entire province had passed the college exams. In 2011, all 84 senior girls from the KLC passed the university entrance exam.

Higher education leads to jobs, better healthcare, infrastructure, and leadership in women, who are determined to get out of poverty. If Afghanistan's widows can generate income, through jobs like basic handiwork, they will also become empowered and gain the respect of men and leaders as they participate in the economy and help support their families.

### **The Project Budget:**

The total program budget for 2012-2014 is \$193,610 of which DFW requested grant amount is for \$45,000.

<b>Program Budget Items Supported by DFW</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Khurasan Learning Centers – Qalai Qadam and City Center</b> For each center a director, assistant to director, teacher salaries, rent & utilities, wood for heat	\$6,000	\$12,000	\$6,000
<b>Women’s Literacy KLC – Qualai Qadam and City Center</b> Teachers salaries, books, supplies, wood for heat, transportation for women	\$3,000	\$6,000	\$3,000
<b>University Scholarship Program</b> Transportation and school supplies	\$1,500	\$3,000	\$1,500
<b>AFN In-Country Representative</b> Visits to KLCs and scholarship recipients	\$500	\$500	\$ 500
<b>DVD cost</b>	\$1,500		
<b>Total of Program Budget supported by DFW</b>	<b>\$12,500</b>	<b>\$21,500</b>	<b>\$11,000</b>

### **How the organization measures success**

#### **AFN will base program success on the following criteria:**

- 500 girls move up two grade levels of Math, Science and English at Khurasan Learning Centers
- 90 graduates pass Concord college exams each year (180 total)
- 100 women achieve 3rd grade level of literacy, mastery of sewing/handiwork skills, and generate income
- 16 outstanding, impoverished girls attend University with \$360 yearly scholarships

#### **Prior Successes have been evidenced by:**

- Khurasan Learning Centers enrolled to capacity within first week of operation

- Number of girls passing Concord college exams went from one to 85 in four years of KLC Operation
- 12 girls currently excelling at Kabul University under scholarship program; two graduating this year with degrees in midwifery and nursing
- 80 women enrolled in literacy program advocated to increase course from two to three years in order to expand skills
- While most schools close during the harsh winters, students and elders lobbied passionately to keep doors open 11 months out of the year
- Increased reach into the community and support from families for their girls to delay marriage and continue their education
- Community ownership of the KLCs has been proven by residents fixing roof leaks, buying extra wood for heaters, and other supportive tasks without requesting aid from Afghan Friends Network
- Teachers go above and beyond their duties, volunteering to teach additional English classes in their free time to underserved students

### **Voices of the Women**

"Two years ago, I had gone to the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Ghazni where I wanted to file a complaint. I waited in line for quite a while to voice my issues, and when I finally reached the representative (who also happened to be female), I was shunned and she told me to "go away you stupid Afghan Hazara. You don't even know how to speak properly. Nobody cares about your problems." It was the pain and shame I was made to feel that made me want more for myself. I was determined to become literate and to make sure my daughters and sisters also learned to read and write so that they would know their rights and be able to defend themselves. Now I am not ashamed anymore."

- *Zakira, Khurasan Learning Center Women's Literacy Program attendee*

"When the women first come to the literacy class their psyche has been greatly affected by war and many years of turmoil. They really struggle at first but by 2-3 months into the program the women blossom. They start smiling, they tell jokes and they look happy."

- *Fatema Mushtaq, Khurasan Learning Center Executive Director*

"Unfortunately, in most of our hospitals even in the Kabul city there are no professional nurses. I saw that the person who was cleaning the hospital was also applying the catheter of gall bladder, and it really hurt me that without having any knowledge those women were working at those parts which was not their responsibility, but fortunately by the kindness of Allah now I and like me other Afghan girls are going to be professionals to help their Afghan sisters."

- *Fahima, former Khurasan Learning Center student, AFN University Scholarship recipient*

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<sup>i</sup> Map and information from [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)