

Positive Parental and Elder Involvement

In the last few months, there has been some unrest in Helmand Province, where our Dr. Mohammad Kharoti School is located. The events that have recently occurred there have caused some amount of concern among the teachers, parents, and students. Although the turmoil challenged the school's progress initially, the overall reaction has been positive and encouraging.

In January, the principal of our school suddenly left for Pakistan, without talking to anyone at the school. The rumor concerning his departure was that he was threatened by some unknown person, but this rumor never was corroborated. At the same time, there were occasional absences of boy and girl students who were afraid to come to school. Also, some of the teachers began to worry that the presence of female students was threatening the future of the school.

In response to these setbacks, about 70 parents and elders gathered in an extraordinary meeting. They discussed why the principal left for a month without communicating with anyone and concluded that his leaving was inappropriate. The principal's family members invited him to return to his



Community Involvement from the beginning.

(See **POSITIVE PARENTAL** on page 3)

Successful Student Teachers

At the time our school started in 2001, there had been no schooling in the area for almost 20 years. All students started as first graders, no matter what their ages. Some of the brighter and more motivated older students moved very quickly through the lower grades. A number of them have passed the sixth grade and are taking our more challenging classes, including advanced mathematics.

At the same time, because of the unrest and other circumstances, we have sometimes been short of teachers, especially female ones. Therefore, the head teachers evaluated some of the older students and found five of them,



Young, bright, and already a part-time teacher helping to support her family.

three male and two female, to be adept enough to teach first grade classes. These "student teachers" attend their own classes after instructing first graders in the morning. The other teachers have decided to treat the student teachers as equals, ensuring each of them a salary of USD\$50 per month.

The story about one of these students, Caldara, is particularly heartwarming. She was one of the first students to attend our school, and her success has served as a catalyst for other girls. Her father was killed during the Russian

(See **SUCCESSFUL STUDENT** on page 3)

A Mother's Praise

Mrs. Ghazi is the proud mother of one of our girl students. She and her farmer husband are illiterate and unable to tell



Hard work at school provides practical help at home.

the denominations of the Afghani bills they receive. They either guessed the values from the color of the bills or asked the Mullah to help them count.

She openly thanked us for opening our school when she recently spoke to Dr. Mohammad Kharoti, the school's founder: "My daughter can now read the numbers on the money, and we no longer have to go to the Mullah." Beyond this very practical application, her daughter's education has also enhanced their overall family life: "She reads poetry in Pashto to me and my husband." (Dr. Kharoti says that he loves to hear the students talk in Pashto because their vocabulary is already much more extensive than the uneducated locals.)

Mothers who have daughters in school, such as Mrs. Ghazi, are very important to their success. They see the great improvements in their daughters' lives and want to see them succeed. Mrs. Ghazi concluded: "I don't want my daughter to be like me. I would never take my daughter from school and give her away for a dowry. I would do anything to ensure that she has an education." ♦

Contact us

Write to:

Green Village Schools
PO Box 80061
Portland, OR 97280

E-mail:

info@greenvillageschools.org

Visit our Web Site:

GreenVillageSchools.org

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Thoughts from the New 'Kid' on the Board

When asked to join the Green Village Schools' (GVS) Board last December, I confess my ignorance about Afghanistan. I knew little about its geography and even less about its history and culture. Since that day, my learning curve has been steep and has not leveled off much until recently. I thank all the board members for what I have learned but I must also confess, I still haven't read all the information I was deluged with during my first couple of weeks.

I have been fortunate to spend a lot of time with GVS founder (and former Afghan nomad), Dr. Mohammad Khan Kharoti, working on projects and attending meetings where he was asked to speak. Mohammad has patiently explained the subtleties and complexities of the challenges facing the Afghan people. He and his son, Yama, have helped me understand that the media often misleads those who would be informed, by over simplifying explanations of complex issues.



Moving books to storage are (L to R) Quint, Chair; Mohammad, President; Rip, the 'New Kid'

It can be difficult for Americans to understand the recent unrest and damage to Afghan schools since we live in a

(See **THOUGHTS FROM** Continued on page 3)

Our First Acre Soon to be Filled

We have just finished the conceptual layout for our first acre of land. Getting the dimensions and working in metric has presented some challenges, but we can now see how it will all fit together. There is a lot of building yet to be completed, including the addition of a second story of classrooms. Even after we complete this, we will need more land to enable us to meet the demand we are experiencing. ♦



We need to find a way to provide for the increasing demand on our facilities if we are to succeed.

Growing Demand

Recently there has been an increase in inquiries from people further away from the school asking how their children can gain admission. One reason for this expanding interest is that it is one of the few schools open in the area that is still teaching girls; secondly, according to government tests, it has achieved high academic standards; thirdly, it is not on government property where parents feel their children are less safe. Rather, it is a school which belongs to the people of Shin Kalay who take an active role in its administration and support. We are hopeful that we can build fast enough to meet this demand. ♦

Mohammad Khan to Visit the School This Fall

Our President and founder is planning to travel to the school this fall.



As in the past, meetings with the staff, villagers, and students will be a priority for Mohammad on his trip.

Coordinating and assisting from the U.S. is difficult and having a firsthand knowledge of the progress and speaking with all those involved, staff and villagers, is critical to ensuring that we are maintaining trust and progressing in the right direction. ♦



This quilt was donated to the children in 2005. It reads:

"Best Wishes /
Harmony, Justice /
Health, Peace, Joy /
Green Village Schools."

This Newsletter is dedicated to all those who share in this dream.

position if he met with the parents and elders and explained himself, but he refused to do this and was laid off.

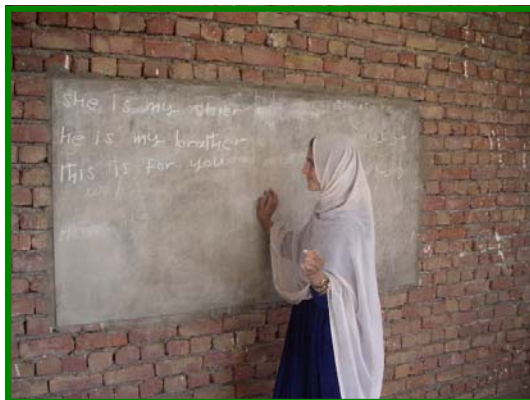
Next, the villagers discussed the teachers' concerns about the continued presence of female students. Very pointed questions were asked of the teachers: "Were there specific instances when someone came up to you and threatened you?" The answers were uniformly "no."

The parents and elders concluded that all the concern rested on rumors and that the school should continue to teach boys and girls. They announced that any teacher who was uncomfortable with this was welcome to resign.

This proactive involvement by influential villagers is encouraging. Their faith in their school helps GVS board members here in the U.S. to continue to be very positive about our first school's future. ♦

occupation, and her mother supports the family of seven on a small piece of land. The extra money that Caldara brings in is vital to her family. She also worked for the United Nations during voting time at the school, helping the women voters. Her experience as a teacher emboldened her to speak out when others got paid by the UN, and she didn't. She pressed the issue and got her money.

It is stories such as this that show how our school is truly empowering Afghan women and girls! ♦



School emphasizes English so that students can eventually use modern text books not available in Pashto.

country where schools are prized and funded so well. Some may wonder about the advisability of supporting a project in a country filled with apparent self destroying activity. Then I remember that in Afghanistan education has skipped generations of children due to war, drought, poverty, and foreign occupation. Now we are asking these people to make major changes to bring them into the 21st century - changes to a way of life that has helped them survive.

This is not to say there are not many already working to restore Afghanistan. There are, particularly in the cities, Afghans who are and have been working hard to restore peace in their country. Regrettably, the major media seems to ignore their efforts. But "Change" remains one of the most basic of fears of mankind and **we can not expect a society to change through osmosis.** It takes education, without which a society's unrest will continue



"Some look like wonderful ragamuffins"

and progress will be impossible.

I have spent many hours studying over 2,000 digital pictures of the Shin Kalay School, and Mohammad graciously came to my home and explained the significance of the activities pictured. I am still amazed by, to my Western eyes, the primitive living conditions. Yet, when I look at their eyes, I don't see despair; I see stoic determination. I can't imagine these people sitting around expecting others to pick up the pieces. Rather, I realize they only want the tools to do the work and the stability in their environment to finish it.

Then there are the children: some look like wonderful ragamuffins, some have a delightfully mischievous look about them, others a bit of fear, but most show hope and

excitement. The girls in their brightly colored dresses seem like beautiful roses growing among a home of thorns. When provided basics like books and pens, and even toothbrushes and toothpaste, their joy is



With an appreciation for the basics

unnerving and a little humbling. If ever there was a dream factory, the GVS school in Shin Kalay is it. Their school provides the children with hope that they will be able to advance beyond a daily challenge of just surviving.

This appreciation for the basics and concentration on school work definitely contrast with the norm in our society. When I was growing up we laughed at our parents when they talked about walking miles to school in snow drifts up to their waists. But in Afghanistan, the children come to school (if their parents allow them) in spite of possible dangers which could threaten their lives. I hope for a day when their children and grandchildren will roll their eyes when they hear these unbelievable stories being lived out today.

So, I may still be the 'new kid' on the board who, along with other volunteers, are working to help make the school in Shin Kalay possible, but I am getting the "bug" and experiencing the excitement of this challenge. This newsletter's stories tell how the school is already positively affecting lives. I hope they will help you experience the feelings of hope this school is starting to provide the children and villagers in Shin Kalay.

Please join us in building a civil society for a determined but struggling people. In this day of electronic marvels, you don't need to live in Portland, Oregon to help. ♦

[Kent F. (Rip) Van Winckel is the Executive Director of GVS and can be reached at: ripvw@greenvillageschools.org]



P.O. Box 80061
Portland, Oregon 97280



GREEN VILLAGE SCHOOLS

"We can not expect a society to change through osmosis. It takes education, without which a society's unrest will continue and progress will be impossible."

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

I recently learned that only 5% of U.S. private donations support foreign projects. Considering the horrors of and the continuing consternation from nine-eleven, I think we should reconsider this. Security measures are not enough. We need to increase our support of efforts which provide the tools for the citizens of these countries to build more stable and civil societies in which they can prosper. This is our ultimate goal. With your help, our own children should be able to live with greater peace than we are experiencing today. ♦

[Kent F. (Rip) Van Winckel, Executive Director.]

