



1 May, 2010

Dear Friends of AFCECO orphanages,

This month was full of dramatic events, a partnership with a local university, a presidential summit, further media coverage, but nothing stands close to the experience of watching 22 orphan girls donning uniforms, 11 red and 11 white, taking an official soccer field by storm. Yes, the first Afghan national girl's soccer team, right in our own family! Thanks to a generous offer from our new friends at the American University in Kabul, we have full use of their nicely manicured, irrigated, legal sized and marked soccer field. Twice a week for two hours the two teams take lessons and then scrimmage. Their eyes light up, and though they are exhausted they utilize every minute they have of this newfound freedom. The benefits of this outlet cannot be stressed enough. For many of these girls freedom just to run, to shed their scarves, to do what boys only do is emotionally and physically transformative. It also alleviates built up issues connected to trauma in their lives, issues not easily mitigated inside the four walls of the orphanage or the school. The effects can already be seen on their faces. The boys, too, are getting their share of this wonderful resource, as it seems the facility is hardly ever used by the university community.

Use of the field is connected to a larger partnership developing with the American University of Afghanistan, wherein we are enlisting the services of six faculty and staff members as volunteers to teach English to over a hundred of the younger children, as well as one arts and crafts class. It is a boon in that we wish to establish strong language skills in the children while they are ripe for this



kind of learning and before we have to scramble as we are with the older ones to prepare them for further opportunities beyond the orphanage. It is also a boon for the faculty who otherwise go stir crazy in their highly controlled security driven lives. They are eager to get out, to be a part of the greater community. Along with these arrangements the university is going to play host to a performance by the drama group (an Afghan version of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound) and the singing group at a fundraiser for the orphanages organized by the AUAF students. 16 of our oldest children were invited to view the debut of a film made here in Kabul by and Afghan director, a moving documentary about the lives of two young Afghan boys addicted to heroin. These enriching experiences are a vital part of our mission, and could lead to other avenues for growth. Administrators at AUAF are looking ahead to bringing some of our children into their fold, to attend arguably the best undergraduate program in Afghanistan. Thanks go to Mike Smith, a senior lawyer for the university who spearheaded this entire partnership.

And thanks go to our Director, Andeisha. These months away from her beloved orphanages have not come without their degree of sacrifices. But if it were not for her networking and journeying through America all spring, Mike Smith never would have known about us, as it was she he met in Washington D.C. last time he was there. Andeisha is on a plane home tomorrow. Her travels have brought us closer to the world in ways we could have never dreamed, through awards and most recently a major world summit on entrepreneurship. Her travels have brought further support, and volunteers, and exposure. But for her, when asked, the point of this trip and its resounding success depended on visiting as many of the wonderful sponsors as she could. In an ensuing trip, which undoubtedly for her won't be far off, she plans to include the western portion of America on her itinerary.

Finally a report from our volunteer Ian Pounds regarding his classes. He presently teaches around a hundred of the children, as well as drama and a budding chorus. (He admits his repertoire of music is purely folk bound.) Most imperative for him are the intensive small classes he facilitates for the 20 oldest orphans who in two years will graduate high school. Two years is enough time, but barely, for him and other tutors to raise these children's abilities to university standards of admission. Though there will be spots at AUAF, opportunities are slim here in Afghanistan, and seriously competitive. There are 100,000 applicants for only 20,000 slots in higher education anywhere in country. That is why Ian seeks avenues to other schools in other parts of the world, places keen on diversification of their student body and able to provide scholarships. Ian's classes are a great motivator for all the children 14 and older. They are all eager to learn, eager to excel, eager to create a path into a future that was once unimaginable.



As always, we send our best wishes and appreciation for your involvement in this unfolding and hopeful story.