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1 February, 2010

Dear Friends of AFCECO orphanages,

Normally mid-winter would be a time we'd have little to say, with the children out of school and projects merely in the planning stage, but it appears given all we have to report this newsletter will be a lengthy affair. First, a report from Italy: the 12 children we sent to Milano have settled in and are making dramatic use of their winter break. As you know there is nothing like an immersion in another culture to develop language skills and build character. A world has opened up for these children, a world they will carry with them through their lives. Special thanks go out to all our Italian sponsors and friends who make this possible..



Once again that outside world has tipped its hat in favor of our dream to positively change the lives of orphans and ultimately the life-blood of Afghanistan as a whole. Vital Voices, a group determined to promote women leaders working to effect change around the world is presenting our Executive Director their Rising Voices award. She will attend their week-long conference, culminating March 10th when she and five highly esteemed co-honorees will attend a formal ceremony at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. To learn more go to: <http://vitalvoices.org/get-involved/global-leadership-awards> With great humility we welcome such an outpouring of recognition, knowing full well this award goes out to all of you who stand beside us.

In that spirit AFCECO is pleased to add Solace for Children to our growing family of partnerships. The U.S. based program invites sick children to receive treatment they cannot otherwise find in their home countries. This summer over 30 of our orphans may be going to America for medical attention they desperately need. There is no greater gesture than healing children to broadcast to the world our common humanity and the desire for peace.

Speaking of health, here in Kabul we have opened our first gymnasium as well as a medical clinic staffed with pediatricians. Already our children have been swept up in yoga and martial art classes, and aside from the obvious benefit of a clinic there is great opportunity eventually to reach out to our community, which in turn develops a relationship that strengthens our sustainability in terms of local support. Additionally, some of our children will gain first aid skills, perhaps setting their sights on one-day becoming health practitioners themselves. It is hard to imagine where we were a year ago in terms of services we could provide for the children.



In terms of local support, special classes are moving along swiftly with 12 volunteers from Kabul University using their winter break to teach various subjects to the children. In addition, Ms. Sol, a Philippine volunteer has kindly agreed to teach advanced English to the older girls.



As we started in last month's newsletter, we'd like to continue to address common questions people have for AFCECO regarding the children and our mission. This month we respond to what is perhaps the greatest concern people have whether they be sponsors or casual visitors. What will happen to the children when they turn 18, and how will they be able to return to Afghan villages and be free and equal, especially the girls?



We expect the children to remain in the orphanage at least till they complete high school (12th grade). Right now we have many children (around 40) that are 1 or 2 years behind this target. It is a high priority to address the fact these older children have until recently not had the benefit of schooling comparable to the skills most nations understand as the right of every child. That is why they will soon have their own space to live in, to focus on immersion in their studies and in addition extra tutorials with professional teachers both in and outside Afghanistan, including the use of virtual learning on the Internet.

The next step for them is to get admission to university. Our volunteer Ian Pounds has already begun establishing partnerships with institutions interested in bringing some of our students into their communities. For example, the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh and the Afghan founded Scholars Initiative are looking forward to regular admission of AFCECO children into their programs in the future. Ian is also working to place some of our children in fifth-year immersion programs with renowned private schools in the U.S. such as Hotchkiss, Taft and Philips Exeter. Of course there are institutions here in Kabul such as Kabul University and American University of Afghanistan, as well as technical schools to look toward. In addition to a university education, we will try to find jobs in which to place the older children. In some cases, who better to work on AFCECO projects than the grown orphans themselves? In all cases we will guide these children to learn how to stand on their own feet and also help their families.

Usually, university students live either in hostels or rent houses. We are not inclined to drop our children on the side of the street and wish them well. Instead, we will guide them as they gradually wean themselves from us into their own productive lives. This means providing them with special houses while working or studying in university, giving them access to computer labs with Internet access, a good library, as well as to keep them together in mutual support. To sum up, AFCECO will stand behind the children as any family would do, and will remain in touch with them throughout their life and encourage them to be good models of helping their own people

Despite the domination of ultra conservative ideas, clearly it is hard to impose such ideas on a well-educated person who ensures a good life for a family. For instance, let's consider a religious and conservative family that prefers its daughters to stay home, not appear in public, remain indoors and serve their fathers, brothers and husbands. But if that family has a daughter who is a doctor or a midwife respected by all people, who provides desperately needed services and earns good income, a father will not impose all those restrictions on his daughter because his interest above



all is gaining some semblance of prosperity in a country where basic human needs are scarcely fulfilled.

As for our orphan boys, one hour talking with them you will see how they will never require the women in their lives to be subservient to their selfish needs, nor will they every raise a hand against them. They will be examples to their peers wherever they go. They will work with women rather than against them, thereby strengthening their own volition.

One way to swim against the tide in Afghanistan is to gain a strong enough position that nobody could stand against. We expect the majority of our children will acquire good reputations, be respected for their knowledge and attain jobs that will be valued by Afghans everywhere. Regardless of whether a boy or a girl, such an influential member of a family (a family that is very poor, uneducated and in some cases desperate to feel hope) can make a big difference in changing the culture of that family if not an entire village.



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