Dining for Women Progress Report 2013

Afghan Friends Network delivers sustainable programs in education and cultural exchange that nurture potential, promote dignity, and support bold steps in Afghanistan.

A brief description of what has been accomplished so far, including progress on the goals and objectives of the program DFW is funding. What impact has been made through DFW’s funding?

DFW will be glad to know that our students and teachers have had a landmark year. Fifty-two out of 70 female students from our Khurasan Learning Centers (KLCs) passed the college entry exams (Konkor exams). This was a steep increase from last year. In total, approximately 760 girls have learned 4th – 12th grade math, science and language skills this year. (The number of girls attending the KLC fluctuates by a couple of girls each month, though the number of attendees in 2013 has been increasing each month.) The KLCs played an important role in Ghazni Province this spring when public schools were closed due to teacher strikes. Despite this instability in the public sector, hundreds of students were able to keep up their studies during the critical end-of-year period thanks to our supplementary center model.

Afghan Friends Network’s Women’s Literacy Program is filled to capacity at 80 women, and we are researching an increase in the number of women served as we proposed to DFW. Our program director, Fatema, has developed entry criteria so the priority is given to girls who are otherwise not allowed to go to school, and mothers of girls currently in the KLCs. Many women in the program are widows.

We are thrilled to already have 17 girls in our University Scholarship Program; that is one more girl than we had targeted in our proposal. These girls are some of the brightest and most in-need graduates from the KLCs. Several have lost one or both parents, and some families have moved into the city in order to give their girls access to education. Our four new scholarship students – supported by DFW funds - are Farzana, Zia Gul, Sakina, and Khatema. They are studying education, physiotherapy, and psychology.
In Their Words

“I could not attend courses in [my home village], so I was living with one of our relatives to study in KLC. I am the only person from my family who has a chance to be a university student. I will teach the children of Afghanistan to build a new Afghanistan.” - Farzana, Education major

“This was my biggest wish since my childhood to be an educated person, so now that Allah has given me this opportunity I really do not want to miss it. As we know, Afghanistan is a poor country and there are a lot of medical problems between people, so I want to be a physiotherapist and use my knowledge for best of my people and my family.” – Zia Gul, Physiotherapy major

“If AFN helps me then AFN helps all of my family and makes the future of my 3 sisters.” – Sakina, Psychology major

“My father is a farmer and now we two sisters are accepted at university my father is not able to help we both. If AFN gives me this scholarship then we both sisters will manage to continue our studies. I want to study so that I become a teacher and I find the ability to help one Afghan one day as you are helping us.” – Khatema, Education major

Has anything changed in regard to the original program goals and objectives? If the budget has changed, please include the new program budget.

We originally projected that 90 students would graduate from our KLC this year. The 12th grade class size was smaller than we estimated, so graduates numbered 70. This does not indicate a drop in overall attendance, however – we saw even more students this year than last.

We have stayed on budget.

Have you experienced any significant challenges or obstacles in implementation? If so, how are you addressing them?

In the past, our University Scholarship Program manager, Farghana, had been less responsive and thorough in her quarterly reports than we felt was needed. Our board contact and Farghana spoke through obstacles and expectations. This resulted in a new report form and Farghana has been sending excellent quarterly reports since. Another reason why our monthly conversations with our Afghan colleagues are so valuable!

In anticipation of the troop withdrawals of 2014, we contracted with a group of consultants from Inspire, Inc. to better understand potential challenges and opportunities. This was part of an in-depth strategic planning process to develop a new Five Year Strategic Plan (2013-2018). We would be happy to share a summary of our plan with DFW.
Has the timeline for the program changed from the original funding application?
No. The national school calendar is still the basis for our program calendars.

Has funding changed for this program? For example, have you received unexpected funding from another source?
Yes, we were excited to receive a grant from Catherine Bertini Trust Fund for Girls’ Education. This grant will help us meet our annual budgets for the University Scholarship Program, Khurasan Learning Centers and Women's Literacy Program in 2013 and 2014.

How much of the original DFW restricted funds have been disbursed and how much remain?
To date, we have used $18,909 of our DFW funds as disbursed below.

- Each of the Girls’ KLC locations (2): $4,352
- Each of the Women’s Literacy Program locations (2): $2,176
- Girls’ University Scholarship Program (4 new scholars): $4,352
- Video for DFW chapters and future outreach: $1,500

Remaining funds are reserved to fulfill each program’s budget for 2013, as well as fund expansion of the Women’s Literacy Program, more scholarship students, and improvements and/or expansion of the KLCs in the coming years. We cannot thank DFW's members enough for their generosity.

Is your organization or program situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant program staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?
No, both our organizational structure and situation have remained steady despite some unrest in Ghazni Province.

We are sobered by the reality that much in Afghanistan is changing during NATO and US troop withdrawals and unpredictable peace negotiations. On visits to our programs, the women in our literacy program have expressed their gratitude for the consistency of AFN's programs, and their fear of that evaporating. Consistency is all too rare in Afghanistan. This is a testament to our program director, principals and teachers’ devotion to education, and our supporters’ loyalty to the girls and women in Afghanistan.

One exciting note is that AFN recently completed an in-depth strategic planning process in order to develop a new Five Year Strategic Plan (2013-2018). Over the eight months of planning, we simultaneously partnered with a professional team of consultants from Inspire,
Inc. in order to better understand the potential risks and opportunities associated with the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014. We are proud to explicitly lay out our program priorities, identify key resources, and lay out a clear implementation and evaluation plan for the next five years in anticipation of upcoming changes in Afghanistan. All of this leads toward our vision of a more peaceful tomorrow in Afghanistan and beyond.

Blog-style summary of impact (2-3 sentences)
Thanks to Dining for Women’s outpouring of support, Afghan Friends Network’s educational programs are closing the gender gap for 760 4th-12th grade girls, granting university scholarships to 17 exemplary young women, and bringing literacy and handiwork skills to 80 women in the rural province of Ghazni, Afghanistan. In the words of Zia Gul, one of our new scholarship recipients, “This was my biggest wish since my childhood to be an educated person.” Another new recipient, Farzana, writes, “I am the only person from my family who has a chance to be a university student. I will teach the children of Afghanistan to build a new Afghanistan.” Thank you, DFW, for strengthening their capacity to do just that.

Message to the members of DFW
Several of our board members had the opportunity to speak at your San Francisco Bay Area chapters. It was a moving experience, to see hundreds of “ordinary” women gather to learn, connect and support their sisters in places like Afghanistan. During each of our visits, the #1 wish of our girls and women is that we do not forget them. You are bringing this wish to life. You have helped us support Afghan-led education for 760 girls, 17 university students, and 80 women – but just as importantly, you have reinforced a web of solidarity that adds to each of our lives. Thank you.

Important note: In order to keep the girls and women supported by Afghan Friends Network safe, we are unable to show the faces of students and teachers or to include their last names in any public materials. We appreciate your understanding of our need to provide extra caution when it comes to the well-being of the girls and women of the KLCs.