

# Support & Networking Program

Newsletter



**One person, one email, one project at a time**

Connecting women of social conscience and developing projects for social and economic improvement in Afghanistan

## NSP has a new name: Support and Networking Program (SNP)

We have changed our name to Support and Networking Program, or SNP for short. This was done to save confusion with another Afghan program with the initials of NSP. The Afghan National Solidarity Program is an initiative aimed at redeveloping Afghan villages. The Support and Networking program is a project of CharityHelp International and our sister organization AFCECO (Afghan Child Education and Care Organization) At SNP our mandate is to empower Afghans through productive one-to-one partnerships.

## Support & Networking Resource Center: A center where Afghan women can Email, learn and connect.

SNP is pleased to announce the opening of a Women's Resource Center for SNP participants in Kabul. It is a 6 X 7 meters hall with five computers and a large meeting table. Women from SNP can use the internet free of cost and can meet with the SNP Coordinator, if they have any questions. The SNP Women's Resource Center is a response to our need to have a place for participants to meet each other, to use the internet to email their program-appointed mentors, and will serve as a training space to teach how to use smart phones. The first \$4000 of computer equipment was purchased by a grant from The Fund for Women in Asia.

Prior to the opening of the SNP resource center, women and their families would complain that internet cafes were not accessible or safe. Many traditional internet cafes are expensive. In Afghanistan, women are not encouraged to go to such places in which women and men mix, therefore, internet cafes in Kabul



are not suitable for women. Here men do not respect women, behaving with no manners and in a way that makes women feel uncomfortable in such places. This often led women to avoid participating in our program or they would begin, but after facing some problems accessing the internet, would lose interest in the program. The SNP Women's Resource Center is a secure place for women to meet, work, access resources, and use the internet. In the future, we will arrange technology workshops also. In Afghanistan, working women are in the minority. While our younger generation is familiar with computer and internet, most of these women have studied in Pakistan and Iran. But more mature women are less schooled and have a lot of problems fully utilizing the advantages of computers and the internet. In our resource center Women can learn to become familiar with email and the internet and teach women to make email ID's. After practicing Skype and email they will become experts in

most of the computer's functions.

What is involved in opening? After the carpenters had finished working, the equipment was purchased and installed. The SNP resource center is now ready to open. The office is located in the offices of our sister organization, AFCECO's new office. For more information please contact one of the SNP Coordinators.

Best regards,  
Durkhanai Mateen

Durkhanai is the former NSP Coordinator in Afghanistan. We are sad to see her go, but look forward to working with a new Coordinator soon.

**AFCECO** is celebrating as An-deisha Farid is awarded the 'Vital Voices Award' Keep up to date on the latest SNP and CharityHelp News with a visit to: [www.youtube.com/charityhelp](http://www.youtube.com/charityhelp)

## Afghan SNP Participants Speak

### Peace

Gun hung on your shoulder,  
You come to welcome me-  
Ruffled and shabbily  
dressed!

This  
Is not you;  
A man riding a red horse  
was supposed to come.  
You crown my hair  
With poppy blossoms!  
Where is the crown of roses  
I awaited?  
You smile  
And half-dead butterflies of  
hope,  
Perish on the ground  
Let me free!:  
I fear you!  
You hide mine-fields in your  
pockets!  
They have killed many men  
And have buried them in  
the pit of your heart...  
Your kisses reveal the anxiety  
And your voice  
Reaches me  
Tired and husky.  
Let's go home  
Kiss me affectionately!  
Love will neutralize the  
mines!  
And your kiss  
Is a white dove -  
Holding at its break  
A tender lovely blossom!

- Mahbooba

Mahbuba is a filmmaker in Afghanistan. Her partners are a Toronto filmmaker and NY artist.

### Women of Courage and Resolve Part I: Shafiq

Shafiq works with Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA). Her story speaks to the strength and determination of many Afghan women like herself. Shafiq's partner is Australian School Principle Cassandra. Cassandra's story will be part II on this segment.

I was born in Qundos Northern Province of Afghanistan. My mother was a Tajic from Badikhsahn and my father was a Pashtoon from Kunar. They got married when my mother was 13, and my father 40. I have three brothers and two sisters. My father died when I was 4 years old. Because my brothers were so young we moved to our uncle's house, where we made a big family and it was at this time that difficulties started in our life.

In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and our village became a battlefield and was under siege by the Soviet army. I remember that for a week after the fighting started we stayed in the house and the children hid themselves under the bed for hours. The Mujahidin forces took men from our village to fight against the Soviet forces. My mother hid my 14 year old brother, but when the Mujahidin searched our house they found him, beat him and took him away.

After a month my brother escaped from the Mujahidin and we all moved to Jalalabad. We lived there for a year and then went to Pakistan. We faced lots of problem in our first year in Pakistan. We stayed with relatives and lived in a tent because we had left everything in Afghanistan. My two brothers worked very hard.

My family was one of those families of Afghanistan who thought that girls should stay at home and not go to school. We have a proverb that says "A woman should be at home or in the grave."

For various reasons (migration to Pakistan, sharing their culture, learning about the importance of the education of women), my older brother decided that I should go to school. The rest of the family were against him, so he moved to another part of Pakistan and took me with him. This divided my big family in two.

So, when I was 8 and half years old I went to a school for immigrant Afghan children. Two years later I went back to my brother's house and saw my mother. My mom hugged me and cried a lot,



but my brothers did not talk to me and they told my mother, that I could not be their sister, if I returned to school. I had to leave my mother with crying eyes in order to continue my education.

I graduated from 12th grade, and taught primary classes for three years. Then I got married in 1999 and moved to Mazar with my husband. Because of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan I had to stay at home, in the house, and couldn't go outside. There was no chance for me to receive further education. But I was eager to learn and my husband helped me by bringing books home for me. I studied politics, history, philosophy and fiction. It was the only way for me to learn more about Afghanistan and the foreign powers that only promote their own interest and prevent our people from living in peace.

In 2003 I started working for HAWCA as a volunteer for the first year when we were living in Mazar. In 2004 we came to Kabul and I got a job with HAWCA as a coordinator of the Safe House for Women at Risk. With the financial support of HAWCA I studied for one year for a Diploma of Business Administration. This helped me improve my English, because although I had studied it at school I had forgotten it by this time. I have also participated in various workshops to develop my understanding of topics including the support of violated women, conventions signed by the Afghan

government, and UN declarations on, human rights, children's rights, women's rights, and also about violence.

In Afghanistan, 25 years of war and foreign intervention have destroyed the country politically, socially and economically. Women and children have been the most affected and they continue to suffer all kinds of violence from the conflict. Furthermore, by our strict cultural traditions and customs women are forbidden access to technology and progress in their lives.

I want to improve my own education, and I do my best to help my children get a good education and I hope for a bright future for them. I want to see my country and people live in peace and I want every woman to receive an education and live her life without violation.

- Shafiq

# Afghanistan

A closer look at Afghanistan's History can give us valuable insight into some of the factors influencing the lives of Afghans today.

The name "Afghanistan", or "Land of the Afghans" first appears in the 16th century memoirs of Mughal Emperor Babur, young, when you consider that people have lived here as long as history can tell. Archaeologists believe that early civilizations date back at least 50,000 years.

Crops of barley, wheat, and dates were domesticated early on, allowing people to develop a culture based on agriculture, trade and more permanent settlements. Artifacts of a peasant farming village from Deh Morasi Ghundai near Kandahar date to 5000 B.C.

Pastoral nomadism which emerged from early village-based pastoralism is still practiced extensively today.

Here, in a country located at the meeting place of Central Asia, India, and the Middle East, Afghanistan is the focal point for many valuable trade routes. The most famous of these is the Great Silk Road from China, West to Europe, through Persia, India, and even as far as Somalia and Indonesia. These routes allowed for positive contributions to religion, literature, architecture, agriculture, gardening and crafts.

Attempts to control the region, make for a painful political history that reads like a dizzying who's who of warriors and Empire builders. She has seen the Persian empire come and go, conquered by Macedonian Alexander the Great in 331 AD, after which Arab warriors brought a number of dynasties as well as the Islamic faith in 652 AD (Islam is the religion practiced by 99% of Afghans today). In 1219 AD Genghis Khan flattened everything in sight, burning and pillaging with a notorious lack of compassion for men women or



children. The list goes on. In the 20th century Britain and the Soviet Union vied for control as Afghanistan was pulled in two directions, finding itself a major piece in a power struggle they called the 'Great game'. Now, In 2001 the US and NATO have added their names, contributing to 4 decades of continuous conflict for the people of Afghanistan.

While foreigners struggle to control of this region, many rulers also come from within Afghanistan. The Durrani Empire, for example, rose in 1747 and lasted for 80 years.

In 1926 King Amanullah founded an Afghan monarchy. He hoped to modernize Afghanistan, quickly decreeing that women should go unveiled in Kabul and that men should wear European clothing. Conservative Muslims did not welcome this rapid change, and in 1929, Amanullah was forced to abdicate, fleeing to Kandahar. The Soviets had supported Amanullah and were convinced that the British were involved. That same year, 1029, Nadir Khan was made ruler. It was Khan who drafted the 1931 constitution, a conservative version of Amanullah's 1923 constitution. Khan didn't last long and on November 8, 1933, Muhammad Zahir Shah was made king. His reign is a 40 year bright spot for Afghanistan during which the country made significant steps

towards modernization. Foreign relations improved. The first University was founded. Women were invited to remove their veils. There was a move towards universal suffrage. The country also held democratic elections. His cousin, former prime minister Mohammed Daoud Khan, finally took power from Muhammad Zahir in a bloodless coup d'etat in 1973. Afghanistan's last king died in exile in Italy on the 23rd of July 2007.

So much is said about the suffering of Afghans, that an observer may forget to see the beauty of the landscape, the culture, and more importantly, the spirit of Afghans themselves. In 1952, US Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas saw this spirit when he observed

*"We of the West have all the rudiments of civilization, all the dividends of a mounting standard of living. But the Afghans – one thousand years behind us in many respects – have a warmth of human relations that is often missing all the way from New York City to San Francisco."*

In future newsletters we will explore the many artistic and technical elements of architecture, poetry and gardens famous to Afghanistan.

Sources for this article are: a) Gritzner, Afghanistan, 2002 b) Runion, The History of Afghanistan, 2007 c) wikipedia



**If you are interested in participating in the Support and Networking Program, please contact the NSP consultants**

Afghanistan: Andeisha Farid at [Andeisha@afceco.org](mailto:Andeisha@afceco.org)  
Canada: Rebecca Aikman at [aikmanr@charityhelp.org](mailto:aikmanr@charityhelp.org)  
US: Jenna Messier at [messierj@charityhelp.org](mailto:messierj@charityhelp.org)

**Links, resources and more information are available on our website**

[www.charityhelp.org](http://www.charityhelp.org)