

Educational Stories 2008

AIL

One success story illustrating how the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) not only trains women to support themselves but also empowers them to be leaders in their communities comes from one of AIL's sewing and tailoring training courses in Herat.

Parima was a student in one of AIL's WLCs in Herat Province. Since completing the course, she has established her own business sewing garments and is earning a good income. Because Parima's village didn't have a center, Parima began training women and girls in tailoring. She is now working in conjunction with AIL and when Parima's students complete her course they will be allowed to take AIL's final sewing exam. After successfully completing the exam, the students will be awarded with a certificate from AIL.

Since the establishment of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) the goal has been to help women improve their situation in life. Following is a story from one of AIL's Women's Learning Centers (WLC) that exemplifies the changes that AIL can make in Afghan women's lives.

When AIL student **Rizagul** was a young girl, her father was put in prison by the Taliban regime where he was tortured and eventually died leaving behind Rizagul as well as her young brother and her unwell, elderly mother.

Four years ago, Rizagul came to one of AIL's rural WLC's in Herat province and began taking various classes, including literacy and sewing. After two years at the center, she was able to gain admission to a regular school at grade level 4, a feat which might have taken 4 years in a regular school, if it happened at all.

Even after gaining admission to the regular school, Rizagul continued to take extra courses after school at the center. Unfortunately, the center was closed due to the poor security situation in the region and Rizagul could no longer take the extra courses she had come to enjoy.

A short time ago, an AIL teacher saw Rizagul at a wedding ceremony in their village. Rizagul could not control her emotions and tears rolled down her cheeks as she told her teacher, "You and AIL were the best thing for me, and I will never, never forget your encouragement and all of the hard work that you did for me." She added, "I can now read in Arabic, I know how to sew and I am a student in grade 6. What I am is because of the AIL center."

She also said that she is sewing dresses to make money for her family and that she has so much business that she has to turn some people away. She is

making a good living, and is able to improve her family's economic situation with her sewing skills.

Rizagul also told the teacher, "With the advice that the center supervisor wrote in my 'memory notebook' (try to learn, work hard for a better future and pray for your future) I am sure that I will go toward a better future."

We'd like to share the story of **Omid**, a student of one of AIL's centers in Mir Bacha Kot. This grassroots center was begun in 2003, and the following story shows the importance of these centers.

My name is Omid, I live in Mir Bacha Kot and am a student in grade 5. I am studying English at the AIL center in my village, and I have finished two levels of this course. I am very lucky to be a student here because my teacher is very talented. He uses new teaching methods and is a very hardworking teacher. He gives us speeches, reading and writing homework and he checks our work regularly.

My father is illiterate and cannot help me when I have problems with my school work. It is important to me to become educated so that day by day my situation in life can improve.

Following is the story of **Mustafa**, a student taking part in AIL's post-secondary education courses. Not all students are able to travel to the university to study, so AIL has begun offering post secondary courses at institutes in its centers to allow these students to continue their education.

I am Mustafa, a student in AIL's Information Technology (IT) class. First of all, I would like to thank the AIL office that is supporting us and helping us to get a quality education.

I am studying IT here and all of the teachers are very talented and very kind. Many of them teach at Kabul University as well. I am 18 and finished school this year. I wished to study IT, and a friend studying here advised me to join AIL's Institute. Now that three months have passed and I only have one left, I feel that my dreams are coming true. I am hoping to finish this program as soon as possible.

Following is the story of **Jamila**, a literacy student in the 7th grade. Jamila attends one of AIL's centers in northern Pakistan that services many refugees from rural areas in eastern Afghanistan where women are generally not educated. This center grew out of a girl's school that was established in 1996 – 1997. In 2002, it was clear that the students from the girls' school needed a place to continue their education and a Women's Learning Center was established there.

One should also take note of the fact that Jamila is currently in the 7th grade, but has not been in school 7 years. Her story is one of hard work and a determination to become educated.

"I am very happy, I can't believe that I am in the 7th class and all because of AIL. My family and I are very thankful for Prof. Sakena Yacoobi, the Executive Director of AIL for providing this opportunity for us. My father is a wrathful person and he didn't want me to go to school and learn things. I was very sad, and day by day I grew older and could not go to school.

Last year we changed our home. Some of our neighbors near our home told us about a women's learning center provided by AIL for women and girls. Once again, I requested that my father give me permission to join this center. After many requests, when my father heard that this center was for women, he accepted and I joined this center.

Now I am in the 7th class and every night I help my father with his shop finances. I am very happy that I can help solve my family problems, and now my father is also very happy. I always pray for Prof. Sakena Yacoobi and the AIL staff."

"My name is **Rahima**, I am 26 years old and have 4 children (2 daughters and 2 sons). I have not been what you would call lucky. My husband became addicted to opium, so I had to find a way to help myself and my family. I am now studying to be a nurse and my two children are going to school. I live in a rented house.

I am thankful for the AIL Health Department for providing me with some food during this month. The donation was from one of the nursing course students. I hope that AIL will be able to continue their donations to me, and am thankful for the private donation from one of my fellow students."

One of the other students in the nursing course saw that Rahima was struggling to feed her family. Rather than see Rahima have to leave the course to try to find a job that would feed her family, another student gave a donation to AIL that AIL

then gave to Rahima. This allowed Rahima to continue on her path to a brighter future as a nurse.

Zareen a student in the literacy class said: “When I got engaged I was in 3rd class and when I got married I was just 16 years old after that my husband continued his education but his parents didn’t give me permission to continue my classes. I argued many times with my husband to get permission from his parents for me.

After a long time, they gave me permission to go and I went to Majoba Herawi center. Now I am in class 8th and I am very happy to be able to solve my problems and my family’s problems. Now my husband is in London and I can write letters to him.

My mother in law says to me, “Thanks to God you have become educated and can solve our family problems.” Now all my husband’s family members take advice from me as an educated woman to help solve their problems.”