
IMPACT IN 2020

- 48 Learning Centers
(371 since 1996).
- 26,774 students at Learning Centers
645 teachers trained
(29,795 since 1996)
- 1,113 attended workshops on leadership, human rights, peace, capacity building (26,631 since 1996)
469 attended workshops on health (17,697 since 1996)
- 6 health clinics with 5 outreach clinics (20 since 1996) 14 CHW posts
- 2311,038 health treatments given (70% women) (3.3 million since 1996)
- 172,776 attendees at health education sessions (3.4 million since 1996)
- 66 cases dealt with at Legal clinic (538 since 2015)
- Support for Radio and TV Meraj and 4 private high schools
- Project in Development: Women's University



Afghan Institute of Learning

Program Overview

“Education is the key to unlocking human potential, but it only works when people are healthy, the economy is stable and the country secure. All of these things are linked together. The country must be secure in order for people to feel safe leaving their homes, which will lead to more people being educated, contributing to the economy and staying healthy. In order to unlock human potential through education, you must not only give them knowledge, but also critical thinking skills and the ability to peacefully deal with conflicts that arise.”

Educated people are better able to get jobs that can support a family, and less likely to be lured into harm, which in turn helps to make communities more secure. But, in order for people to get jobs, the economy must be secure. Finally, people must be healthy in order to be able to learn and to work. The malnourished and sick cannot learn or work. In order to unlock human potential, a way must be found to address all four issues: education, healthcare, economic stability and security, at the same time.”

Mission

The mission of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) is to provide education, training and health services to vulnerable Afghans in order to foster self-reliance, critical thinking skills and community participation.

AIL is committed to bringing peace and dignity to the Afghan people as they struggle to overcome poverty, oppression, devastation and injustice wrought by the last quarter century of war and instability. AIL's internationally recognized work is improving the health and education of Afghan women and children and enhancing the quality of their lives, providing them with opportunity to improve their situations.

About the Afghan Institute of Learning

AIL is an Afghan-non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1995 by Dr. Sakena Yacoobi. It was established to address the problem of limited access for Afghan women and children to education and health services, their subsequent inability to support their lives and the impact of this lack of education and health on Afghan society.

AIL's goals are to lay a foundation for sustainable, quality education and health systems that will last for years to come. AIL focuses in particular on Afghan women and children, so that they can reach their potential, more fully contribute to their families and society and become self-supporting. AIL plays a major role in reconstructing education and health systems and its visionary programs have had a major impact on the society. Since 1995 millions of Afghans have been direct or indirect beneficiaries of AIL's education, training and health services. A number of AIL's programs have been replicated or adopted by the Afghan government and other NGOs.

AIL has offices in Kabul and Herat, Afghanistan and directly serves approximately 350,000 to 400,000 people annually. It employs about 460 Afghans, over 70% of whom are women, and has many women managing projects in communities. AIL offers preschool through secondary education and teacher training in interactive, critical thinking methodologies. It also gives training to members of civil society in subjects such as: human rights, women's rights, leadership, democracy and peace. It provides health education and health care through its clinics and Community Health Workers posts, which are located in villages.

AIL's innovative approach requires community participation in all of its projects, believing that the best results are achieved when everyone is integrally involved from the start. AIL works with community leaders in the planning, development and implementation of all projects. No project is started unless the community has requested it and is involved in it. This strategy means communities contribute 30% to 50% of the resources needed for a project. These community contributions have come in many forms including, volunteer help, assistance with security, donated space, materials and supplies. At the end of 2019, there were 362 volunteers assisting AIL from the communities that it serves. These contributions strengthen the community's involvement in and ownership of AIL projects and are part of ongoing efforts towards achieving sustainability.

An educated and healthy people are the key to a future, developed, self-dependent Afghanistan. With that in mind, AIL works to empower all Afghans: by expanding their education and health opportunities and by fostering self-reliance and community participation through its Learning Centers; through scholarships (some for orphans), through training opportunities for teachers in interactive and critical thinking methodologies; through workshops for members of civil society in subjects such as human rights, women's rights, leadership, and peace; and through providing health education and health care through its health clinics.

Learning Centers

AIL improves the lives of all Afghans by expanding opportunities for women and girls, working with communities to provide education and training. The cornerstone of this effort is the community-based Learning Center model. AIL's centers are schools or educational learning centers which primarily serve rural communities or support the urban poor. Centers are only established at the request of communities and are designed to meet multiple needs of Afghan women and children. Though the primary focus is on females, education is also provided to men and boys.

AIL's programs are all beneficiary driven, with centers set up in communities strictly at their request. Planning,

funding and operations are also undertaken in collaboration with communities. Since supporting its first center, a refugee school in 1996, AIL has opened or supported more than 368 centers. AIL currently operates or supports 46 centers, including ones specifically for street children, girls' and boys' orphanages and the disabled. As older centers become self-sufficient they do not need AIL's help and become independent. AIL supports new centers regularly and continues to expand its centers model to new provinces and distant rural areas.

Learning Centers offer preschool through secondary school level classes and provide courses in academic subjects such as literacy, math, chemistry, algebra, physics, trigonometry, Dari, Pashto and Arabic. The centers also provide income-generating skills classes such as: computing, beauty shop, English, knitting, sewing/tailoring, carpet weaving, embroidery, calligraphy and art. Each center also incorporates into lessons teaching on human rights, peace education, health education, and holds workshops that train women and older girls and boys to be leaders and to advocate for their basic human rights.

The goals of students at centers vary with some simply wanting to learn to read and write, others want to gain an income generating skill so they can start a business and sew clothes for their family. One innovative literacy class uses texting on mobile phones to teach literacy. Illiterate girls and women take a four month course and end up reading at a 4th grade level! Whatever their aim, AIL provides women and children with the opportunity, information, tools and support to achieve their goals.

Training for Teachers and Members of Civil Society

AIL's Teacher Training Program focuses on quality, in-depth education for Afghan teachers in Afghanistan and in the past in the refugee camps of Pakistan. The training greatly increases the capacity of schools to offer quality education to Afghan students. Once teachers are trained in the pedagogical basics of teaching, AIL offers workshops to allow them to go deeper into the next level of education and upgrade the subject matter. In-depth topics are offered through short mini-workshops in order to enable the teachers to attend who have time constraints.

AIL has found that providing intensive workshops, for fewer students in close proximity to where the teachers work, allows AIL to bring this needed education to the most teachers possible. Beyond the basics of teaching techniques, capacity building, and preschool education, subjects presented to teachers through workshops include skills in creating the classroom environment, communications, report writing, management, lesson materials, testing, evaluation, history, IT, writing and English. Other subjects include, health, reproductive health, women's rights, the role of women, self-immolation, leadership, peace and democracy and violence against women. AIL continues to be able to reach out to rural, more insecure areas where the quality of teaching is very low and teachers have never had training and often men and women must be taught in separate classes.

Many of AIL's workshops, particularly those in health, women's rights, leadership, democracy and peace are not only attended by teachers but by local older women, girls and members of civil society. These women are now asking for more in-depth information about subjects that they had not known about before attending an AIL class. These workshops are an example of how capacity building techniques taught during teacher training are opening horizons for Afghan students of all ages, helping them to think differently, encouraging them to want to learn more and to view their futures with more optimism.

Health Services

Access to health care is a human right and AIL takes a holistic approach to providing health care to people. Health education is incorporated in to all AIL's activities, as knowledge about health empowers individuals to care for themselves and their families. Health education is part of any visit by a person to a health clinic.

AIL was the first organization to teach about health at centers and schools and recently provided health training to teachers in Herat public schools, in cooperation with the Ministries of Health and Education.. AIL presently operates 6 clinics (2 in rural Herat, 1 in rural Kabul, 1 in a suburb of Kabul, 1 at an orphanage and 1 at a disabled center). It also has outreach clinics to a street children facility and 5 of its Learning Centers. The clinics provide pre and post-natal care, safe delivery, well-baby care, immunizations, nutrition and primary-care services and health education. AIL also supports 14 Community Health Worker (CHWs) posts out of its Herat clinics, which are each manned by two local people trained by AIL.

AIL provides health education to all people attending its clinics, popular sessions include, immunization, breast feeding, flu, nutrition and sanitation. AIL also offers in-depth health workshops and since 1996, 17,258 women and adolescent girls have attended these workshops. The subjects covered include reproductive health, hygiene, disease prevention and much more. In 2010, AIL began offering Expectant Mothers Workshops in which pregnant women and their caregivers learn about safe pregnancy and childbirth practices and newborn care. This information gives them a better chance of safe delivery for mother and child. Reported births from these workshop attendees show nearly 100% of the women chose a safer clinic birth rather than the traditional home birth.

Leadership, Human Rights and Capacity Training

AIL was the first organization to offer human rights and leadership workshops for females in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan in the late 1990s. At the request of women, AIL also began offering leadership and human rights workshops to men and adolescent boys. Since 1996, AIL has held leadership, human rights and capacity building workshops for 25,957 women, men and adolescents. In 2018, Dr. Yacoobi began working with highly educated, women leaders in Herat to increase their leadership skills in what is called the Women's Empowerment Group. A year-long program, thus far 160 women leaders have participated improving their self-confidence, advocacy and leadership skills, enabling them to compete with others in the job market.

Culture Revival Program

AIL started its intensive cultural revival work in 2011, after an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Information and Culture. The Gawhar Shad Musalla Complex in Herat dates back to the 15th century and houses different aspects of the culture revival program. With the support of AIL, the Gawhar Shad Begum Library and Research Center opened in the Gawhar Shad Mausoleum. Thousands of local students and members of the general public members have visited the library and many thousands of books have been donated. A public library in such an historic space, places the value of knowledge in the highest esteem, as was the case in the past in Afghanistan.

Herat's Citadel is near the Gawhar Shad Musalla Complex and AIL has several classes there which teach Afghan traditional arts and crafts skills. Classes include, calligraphy, miniature painting (Nagaristan Mashhal), carpet weaving, silk weaving, glass making and tile making. Some of the instructors have Art degrees from Herat University while others are skilled craftsmen, with many years of experience.

Publications

AIL publishes books, teaching/training manuals and twice a year, a magazine called Neda-e-Talim. The magazine is educational and news orientated including, articles about AIL, health, news, current events, children's section and much more. Three thousand copies of each issue are printed and available to students and members of the public.

International Conference on Love and Forgiveness

Although AIL has made a significant impact on the education and health of Afghans, the negative impact of continuing war is difficult to counteract. AIL's culture program which is reviving the ancient, peaceful way of life and values of Afghans, is a great beginning. The next step for AIL was to host an international Conference on Love and Forgiveness in April 2012 that highlighted Afghan writers, poets, scholars, and musicians in ways that are reminiscent of Afghanistan's peaceful past. Scholarly speakers made presentations about historic ways of life and the writings of poets such as Rumi, setting a new tone for understanding. Musicians linked with Rumi's poetry, reminded participants of the beauty of music. International and Afghan leaders were invited to participate and spread the good news. The event was filmed so that Afghan school children and communities were able to share in the learning experience.

The conference was a huge success and widely publicized throughout Afghanistan, resulting in many requests for such events in other areas of the country. Since then, AIL has held additional conferences, including one in Mazar e Sharif and another in Panjsher, as well as workshops in schools. Herat school students and poets have met in symposiums to discuss a variety of topics and concepts presented in the conference and are learning about the history and characteristics of Afghans as a loving, forgiving people.

Legal Aid for Poor Women

In 2015, AIL opened its legal clinic in cooperation with the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC), This free clinic, which is housed in the AIL Herat office building, is staffed by 5 female lawyers who provide legal help to indigent women. Women with no financial resources are represented for free; others pay as they are able.

The clients are referred by the two agencies or come by themselves having heard about it on Radio Meraj, Staff lawyers work on a variety of cases, including child custody, protecting property or inheritance rights, and securing justice in cases related to child marriage, marriage without consent of the girl and abuse, divorce and criminal matters. The lawyers speak regularly on Radio Meraj to educate people about the law and to inform women of their rights and the center's services.

Support for Radio Meraj, TV Meraj

In 2015 Dr. Sakena Yacoobi founded Radio Meraj in Herat. The station is housed in AIL Herat's offices and AIL provides some programming and technical support. Each year since opening, the station has won awards for its excellence in broadcasting. It broadcasts 18 hours a day from 6 am to midnight, to 9 out of 15 districts of Herat, an area with a population of 2 million people. The station estimates its listenership to be approximately 1 million.

A major purpose of the programs on Radio Meraj is to enlighten minds and opinions of listeners. Thus, there are programs on health, human rights, democracy, elections, law, violence against women, core values, parental roles and care and education of children and many other topics. Programs are specifically designed to help women take a more active role in society and to educate them in how to manage their households and care for

children. Women are given the knowledge to plan and manage and to develop self-expression in society.

There are also programs directed toward the development of youth working to ensure they are on the path to a successful future. Radio Meraj had a special program in relation to International Day against Drugs to motivate youth not to use drugs and not to destroy their future through substance abuse. The programs include specials for children and children's education. The station regularly has graduate students from the Yacoobi High School Leadership Class as guest speakers.

Dr. Yacoobi with support from AIL staff opened her new station, TV Meraj. This station is also housed in the AIL Herat office. Radio Meraj staff are closely involved with this sister project and working on programming.

Support for Schools

Dr. Yacoobi has founded four private schools, two in Herat and two in Kabul. AIL staff provide teacher training and give support to particular programs run within the schools such as, girls computing and coding and an intensive Leadership Class. The girls coding program is very popular and a team, that entered the 2017 Technovation Challenge girls only competition, won first place at the regional level. The girls designed a literacy app which has audio, alphabet, words and phrases to help illiterate people work on literacy from home on their mobile phones.

The Leadership Class provides 30 students (15 female) with a two-year course in leadership including studying human rights, English, how to be a leader, how to conduct discussions, management, racial discrimination, peace, transformation leadership, transaction leadership and social and societal issues. In addition to study, the group also goes on visits to government and organization sites and conducts community work such as environmental clean-up, greening projects and outreach to hospital patients. Graduates of the course set up a Student Parliament in their school which is involved in student relations, student/staff matters and work on ways to improve the learning environment. This helps students remain engaged in political and social issues and actions, learning to express their opinions and work towards a better functioning society whether that be within a family, community, school or city.

Covid-19 Response 2020-21

The coronavirus pandemic caused significant difficulties for AIL and was devastating for many Afghan families both in health and economics. AIL kept its offices and health clinics open and immediately began providing: disinfection/PPE kits with virus leaflets to families, food packs and cooked meals, converted tailoring classrooms to PPE production for health clinics, broadcast virus information 18 times a day on Radio Meraj, donated health supplies to the government, adapted its education programs to distance learning and gave counseling to families in lock down stress as well as setting up a 50-bed Covid-19 hospital.

This pandemic response showed AIL's ability to be both flexible and adaptive in times of stress and uncertainty and a commitment to continue to serve people no matter the circumstance.

Project in Development

Work has begun on establishing a Women's University in Herat and AIL staff are in consultation with a U.S. university about planning. The university will offer state-of-the-art education opportunities and follow a holistic, innovative and cross-disciplinary education approach with integrated skill-building and practical learning experiences. All the students start by taking intensive English language courses.

AIL's Impact

AIL continues to respond to requests from communities: through its basic programs, expansion of its geographic work area, through developing cultural and environmental projects which are helping to restore both the historic and natural physical past of Afghanistan and by facilitating Emerging Leaders Groups that develop their own community projects.

AIL's programs are making a difference and impacting lives. They are reaching people who are living at the most basic level, by providing them with health care and education, literacy, numeracy, job skills training and other education. People gain self-confidence, the ability to advocate for themselves, start businesses, stay healthy, survive child birth and all of them pass on the information they have learned to family, friends, neighbors spreading the influence of AIL's programs.

People are on a path to improving their lives and stepping closer to self-sufficiency. Systemic change does not happen overnight but AIL's programs are big influencers and progress is being made step-by-step.

AIL is having an amazing impact on the lives of women and girls and ultimately impacting the lives of all members of the communities in which it works. Learning Centers are now also community centers and networking spaces for women. AIL has held Women's Networking Conferences in Herat. Data shows some of the impact but more important than numbers are the stories that AIL hears from participants in AIL workshops, events and classes.

AIL hears from participants about how AIL programs have impacted their lives and the way that women and girls think and view themselves and their role in society.

Salma is a Leadership Workshop participant and she had this to say. " Before attending the workshop I was impatient and intolerant. I didn't believe in my abilities and that was why I didn't enjoy life. The beginning of the first session was not interesting for me because I had no courage to take part. I was indifferent to women's affairs but after the instructor explained the problems of women in our community, tears came to my eyes.

She told the true story of a young girl who was abused by her father and the young woman who reused garbage to pay for her family. Then the class became interesting for me. I was impatient waiting for the next session to start because I wanted to know if the problems of women ended or not. This motivated me to improve. I learned about leadership, administration, communication and capability and I paid attention to all lectures and I got the courage to join in class group activities. I learned that women have: the right to work to overcome the problems of daily life, can share their ideas with men and have their own choices.

On the last day of the workshop I got a certificate and then I decided to get a job to solve my family's money problems. My daughter had always hoped to study in a private school but I was not able to pay for her tuition and that was a great problem for me. I worked on building self- confidence and capability in myself. I got a job and I started a fresh, new life with a new attitude for me and my family. I was able to enroll my children in good schools to educate them well.

This five-day workshop has changed my life greatly. I owe my life and happiness to A.I.L because A.I.L motivated me to find my capacity and encouragement in myself. I heartily thank A.I.L and hope these workshops will be held continuously as a necessity for women."

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