

AIL's IMPACT IN 2019

- 536,605 Afghans received education, health services and teacher training or benefited from AIL teachers trained in 2019 and magazines published 247,714 Afghans (70% women) received health services (3.1 million since 1996)
- 169,394 Afghan women received health education (3.2 million since 1996)
- 979 teachers trained (29,150 since 1996)
- 874,500 students (of all teachers trained by AIL since 1996) have a better education and learn critical thinking skills (10.7 million since 1996)
- 3,298 civil society members trained in leadership, human rights, peace, administration and health (43,215 since 1996)
- 50 grassroots community-based centers and health clinics supported (388 since 1996).
- 120 cases dealt with at Legal clinic
- Support for 1 Radio Station, 3 private schools
- Overall direct and indirect beneficiaries since 1996 18 million



Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL)

Program Overview

“Education is the key to unlocking human potential, but it only works when people are healthy, the economy is stable, and a country is secure. All of these things are tied together. The country must be secure in order for people to feel safe leaving their houses, which will lead to more people being educated, contributing to the economy and staying healthy.”

In order to unlock the 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 acting as puppets for those who wish to do harm, which in turn helps to make things more secure. But, in order for people to get jobs, the economy must be secure. Finally, people must be healthy in order to learn and contribute to the economy. The malnourished and sick cannot learn or work.

In order to really unlock the human potential there must be a way to address all four issues: education, healthcare, economic stability and security.”

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, Executive Director

Mission of Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL)

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

The Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) is committed to bringing peace and dignity to 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, relieving their suffering after three decades of war and civil strife, and enhancing the quality of their lives.

About the Afghan Institute of Learning

The Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) is an Afghan women's non-governmental organization (NGO) which was founded in 1995 by Dr. Sakena Yacoobi to help address the problem of poor 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 is an organization, run by Afghan women, that plays a major part in reconstructing education and health systems capable of reaching the women and children of Afghanistan--whether in refugee camps or in their homes in Afghanistan. AIL's visionary programs have had a major impact on Afghanistan and its people. Between 1996 and December 2019, over 17 million Afghans have been direct or indirect beneficiaries of AIL education, training and health services. A number of AIL's visionary programs have been replicated or adopted by the Afghan government and other NGOs.

AIL presently has offices in Kabul and Herat, Afghanistan. AIL directly serves between 350,000 to 400,000, women, men and children annually, is run by women and employs about 460 Afghans, over 70% whom are women. AIL offers pre-school through university education, training opportunities to teachers in interactive, critical thinking methodologies and members of civil society in subjects such as human rights, women's rights, leadership, and peace, and provides health education and health care through its clinics and Community Health Workers.

AIL's goals are to lay a foundation for quality education and health for years to come and to provide **comprehensive education and health services** to Afghan women and children, so that they can support and take care of themselves.

AIL requires **community participation** in all of its projects, believing that the best results are achieved when everyone is integrally involved. AIL works with community leaders in the planning, developing and implementation of all projects. No project is started unless the community has requested it and is involved in it. Utilizing this visionary strategy, communities now contribute 30 to 50 percent of the resources needed for a project. In late 2019, there were 362 volunteers assisting AIL from the communities that AIL serves. These community contributions have come in many forms, including volunteer help, assistance with security, and donated space, materials, and supplies. These contributions have strengthened the communities' involvement in and ownership of AIL programs and are part of ongoing efforts towards achieving sustainability.

AIL believes that educated people are the key to a future, developed Afghanistan. With that in mind, AIL works to empower all Afghans through **scholarships, particularly for orphans**, by expanding their education and health opportunities and by fostering self-reliance and community participation through its **Learning Centers**; through **training** opportunities to 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 clinics. More detail of each of these programs is provided below.

Learning Centers

AIL is improving 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 AIL's community-based Learning Center model. AIL's Learning Centers are schools or educational learning centers which primarily serve rural communities or support the urban poor in Afghanistan. Established only at the request of

communities, Centers are designed to meet the multiple needs of Afghan women and children; the primary focus is on females but education is also provided for men and boys.

Learning Centers offer preschool through university-level classes, train teachers and administrators, and provide courses in literacy (reading, writing and math), computer, beautician, chemistry, algebra, physics, trigonometry, English, Dari, Pashto, Arabic, knitting, sewing/tailoring, carpet weaving, embroidery, calligraphy, and art. In each of its Centers, AIL also teaches 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 the students vary. Some students simply want to learn to read and write. Others want to learn a skill to earn money or make clothes for their family. In 2012, AIL began an innovative literacy class using texting on mobile phones; illiterate girls and women now learn to read and write at the 4th grade level in 4 months—an astonishing achievement! Whatever their aim, AIL provides women and children with the opportunity, information, tools, and support to achieve their goals.

AIL's programs are demand-driven, with Learning Centers brought to communities strictly at their request. Planning, funding, and operations are also undertaken in collaboration with communities. Since beginning support for its first Learning Center, a refugee school in 1996, AIL has opened or supported more than 368 Centers. AIL currently operates or supports 46 Learning Centers for Afghans, including centers for street children, girls' and boys' orphanages and the disabled. As older Learning Centers become self-sufficient AIL begins supporting new ones. AIL continues to expand centers to new provinces and distant rural areas.

Training for Teachers and Civil Society members

AIL's Teacher Training programs focus on quality, in-depth education to Afghan teachers in Afghanistan (and formerly in the refugee camps in Pakistan), and are changing the way people think and their expectations for their futures. The training of teachers 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.

AIL has found that providing intensive workshops for fewer students, in close proximity to where the teachers are working, allows them to bring this needed education to the most teachers possible. Beyond the basics of teaching techniques, capacity building, and pre-school education, subjects presented to teachers through workshops include additional teaching skills in the areas of creating the classroom environment, communications, report writing, management, lesson materials, testing, evaluation, history, IT, writing, and English as well as general health, reproductive health, women's rights, the role of women, self-immolation, leadership, peace and democracy. AIL continues to be able to reach out to additional rural, insecure areas where the quality of non-AIL teachers is very low and men and women must be taught in separate classes. AIL's impact, through its model of training, supervision, and monitoring is most clear in these areas.

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 and girls, members of civil society, who are now asking for more in-depth information about subjects that they had not known existed prior to their education

through AIL schools. These workshops are a perfect example to show the capacity building techniques taught in AIL teacher trainings are opening up the horizons for Afghan students of all ages to want to learn more.

Health Services

AIL considers access to health care a human right and takes a holistic approach to providing health care to women and children. Health education is integral to all of AIL's activities, as knowledge about health empowers individuals to care for themselves and their families.

AIL was the first organization to teach about health at Centers and schools and recently provided health training to teachers in public schools in cooperation with the Ministries of Health and Education in Herat. AIL presently operates 4 clinics (2 in rural Herat, 1 in rural Kabul, 1 in a suburb of Kabul) and provides clinical services and health education to two orphanages and one street children program. AIL clinics also have mobile teams that visit AIL Centers when needed. The clinics provide pre and post natal care, safe delivery, well-baby care, immunizations, and primary-care services and health education.

AIL also operates mobile medical outreach campaigns and supports 14 Community Health Worker (CHW), two person teams from its clinics in Herat. AIL has taken the next step toward improving maternal children health by offering Expectant Mothers Health Workshops since 2010. These workshops help expectant mothers and their caregivers learn about safe pregnancy and childbirth practices so they have a better chance of both mother and baby survival when they are far from any access to health care. Reported births from these workshop attendees show nearly 100% of the women chose a safer clinic birth rather than the traditional home birth.

For those women and girls who are not able to attend health education classes at AIL's clinics, AIL offers in-depth health workshops. Since 1996, 17,258 women and adolescent girls have attended these workshops.

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 women leaders in Herat to increase their leadership skills in what is now called the Women's Empowerment Program. A year-long program, thus far 160 women leaders have participated.

Cultural Programs

In April, 2011, the Afghan Institute of Learning signed an agreement with the Ministry of Information and Culture to work in the cultural sector with officials of the local government in Herat. Immediately, the staff members of AIL set to work on setting up a wide array of cultural programs.

The Gawhar Shad Musalla Complex dates back to the 15th century and is currently being restored. This complex was chosen to house many different aspects of the cultural programs. In May, 2011, with the support of AIL, the Gawhar Shad Begum Library and Research Center opened in the Gawhar Shad Mausoleum. Since it's opening, thousands of local students and general public members have visited the library and over 1,500

books have been donated to the library by teachers and civil society members. A public library in such a public place is placing the value of knowledge in high esteem as it was in the Afghan past.

Down the road from the Gawhar Shad Musalla Complex is the ancient Herat Citadel, which has recently been restored. AIL has established several classrooms in the Citadel which teach the traditional arts and skills of Afghanistan. Classes are offered in Calligraphy, Miniature Painting (Nagaristan Mashhal), Carpet Weaving, Silk Weaving, Glass Making and Tile Making. Some of the instructors have degrees in Art from Herat University and others are skilled craftsmen who have been performing their trade for years.

A few years ago, AIL reinitiated the publishing of its education and health magazine and now publishes two issues a year. Three thousand copies are printed for each publication and are available to students and the public. Literate Afghans are able to enjoy articles that remind them of their past and a time before war.

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 reverse. AIL's cultural program that has begun to bring back the ancient, peaceful culture 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 presented about historical ways of life and the writings of poets such as Rumi, setting a new tone for understanding. Musicians linked with Rumi's poetry, reminding 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 are able to share in the learning experience.

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

Legal Services for Poor Women

Working with the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC), in the fall of 2015, AIL opened a Women's Legal Clinic Project in Herat to provide legal support for indigent women. Staffed with five, experienced female lawyers in an office near Herat's courts, the Legal Clinic Project assists women referred by the MOWA and HRC, as well as women who hear about the project on the radio or through other means. Women with no financial resources are represented for free; others pay as they are able. Staff lawyers work on a variety of cases affecting women, including child custody battles, protecting property or inheritance rights, and securing justice in cases related to child marriage, marriage without consent of the girl, and abuse. They also speak on regular broadcasts on Radio Meraj to inform women of their rights and the center's services.

Support for Radio Meraj

In 2015 Dr. Sakena Yacoobi founded Radio Meraj in Herat. Radio Meraj is housed in AIL Herat's offices and AIL provides some programming and technical support. The station has been in operation since May 2015,

has won a number of top awards. The station broadcasts 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. The station broadcasts 18 hours a day from 6 am to midnight. A major purpose of the programs on Radio Meraj is to enlighten minds and public opinions of listeners. Thus there are programs on health, human rights, VAW, values and many other topics. Programs are specifically designed to help women take an active role in society and to educate them in how to look after their families. Women are given the knowledge to plan and manage and 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. In addition, the station regularly has graduate students from the Yacoobi High School Leadership Project as guests.

Support for School Programs

Dr. Yacoobi founded 4 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 coding and a leadership project. The girls coding program is very popular and one of the teams that entered the 2017 Technovation Challenge 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 Project, supported by AIL, 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 went on to set up a Student Parliament in their schools 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 their express their opinions and work towards a better functioning society whether that be within a family, community, school or city.

Future Projects

Dr. Yacoobi, with the support of AIL, is currently working on starting a TV station, in Herat, TV Meraj. TV Meraj will be housed in the AIL Herat Offices and Dr. Yacoobi has already begun purchasing equipment and AIL and Radio Meraj staff have begun developing programming.

In addition, Dr. Yacoobi is planning to start a Women's University in Herat to empower women to be leaders. 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.

AIL's Impact

AIL continues to respond to requests from communities through its basic programs, expansion of its geographic area, through developing cultural and tree planting projects that are helping to restore both the physical and historic past of Afghans, and by facilitating Emerging Leaders groups which are developing their own community projects. AIL's programs are making a difference. They are reaching the people who are simply living at the most basic human level by providing them with job skills and literacy, and they are reaching the

people who are ready to take the next step toward self-sufficiency. Systemic change does not happen overnight, but AIL's programs continue to move ahead; step-by-step.

Because of its visionary, long-term goals, AIL is having an amazing impact on the lives of women, and ultimately impacting the lives of all members of the communities in which it works. Learning Centers are now also community centers and networking centers for women and AIL has now held two Women's Networking Conference in Herat. The data shows some of the impact, but more important than numbers are the stories that AIL hears from the participants in AIL workshops that participate in follow up surveys. Time and time again, AIL hears from participants about how AIL programs are impacting the way that women and girls think. One such participant is Salma, whose words we'd like to share with you.

*“My name is **Salma** and I was a participant in **leadership workshop**. Before attending the workshop I was impatient and intolerant. I didn't believe in my abilities and that was why I didn't enjoy my life until I was invited to attend the workshop on leadership held by A.I.L. The beginning of the first session of the workshop was not interesting for me because I had no courage to take part in the class. I was something like indifferent to women affairs, but after the instructors explained the problems of women in our community the tears came from my eyes. For example, they read the real story of a young girl who was abused by her father. The young women who reuse the garbage to pay for her family as well as. Then the class got interesting for me. I was impatiently waiting for sessions of the class to be started because I wanted to know if the problems of women end or not and that motivated me to improve.*

I noted all lectures and I got the courage to share in class group activities. On the last day of the workshop I got a certificate then I decided to get a job to solve the economical problems in my family. In fact, my daughter 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 tried to create self- confidence and capability in myself. In the workshop, I learned that women have the right to work to overcome the problems of daily life. Women can share their ideas with men. Women have their own choices as well as. Then I got a job and I started a fresh and new life with a new minds for me and my family. I could enroll my children in good schools to educate them well.

Finally, this five-day workshop has changed my life greatly. And I owe all my life and happiness to A.I.L. because A.I.L motivated me to find ability and encouragement in myself. In the workshop, I learned about leadership, administration, making communication, and capability. I heartily thank A.I.L for holding the same important workshop for women. I hope the same workshops will be continuously held everywhere for women in Afghan communities as a necessity. Thank you A.I.L, for changing my life.”

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