Annual Report
2017
A Message from Dr. Sakena Yacoobi

AIL’s programs are transforming lives! In this report I will tell you what I have seen on my visits to AIL projects. The holistic approach, which we have always had as the basis of our work, is creating sustainable change in communities. People are being educated, learning about health, taking better care of themselves and receiving quality health care, education and training.

People are learning to accept differences and look at people for quality of character not ethnic group or social class. There are still problems, but a country that has been through 40 years of war and conflict is not going to reach peace and security in a short time. We are making progress but we have a way to go yet. I can see transformation occurring and hope in communities that are working hard together to rebuild their country.

If we keep working to change people’s behavior for the better we can improve society and create peaceful communities. We have seen over and over that conflict is not going to end and it is not going to be the solution for peace. The only way is through the power of education, to teach people to work together and not to have hatred for others. We all must keep hopeful and work harder for the sake of world peace.

I am a social entrepreneur and my work is changing civil society and impacting thousands of young people. The youth of Afghanistan is looking forward to living in a unified society and they are working towards this by building skills in team work, collaboration and coordination. As a change maker I see a better future for my country and for the world with these young people leading the way.

I want to thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for your support for AIL and the Afghan people.

Sakena
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Awards and Speaking Engagements

Sakena was honored to be recognized in 2017 for her work and all that AIL has accomplished. In 2017 she was named as a Sunhak Peace Prize Laureate and received the Sri Sathya Sai Award for Human Excellence in Education. In Afghanistan, she received a Medal of Appreciation from the Afghan Senate and her photograph was added to the Citizenship Wall in the Afghan Presidential Palace, as one of the top civilian and cultural women in Afghanistan. The BBC named her as one of its 100 Inspirational and Innovative Women for 2017.

Sakena works in Afghanistan as CEO of AIL but she also travels the world to speak at conferences and in 2017 she attended 10 major events in 6 countries. She is a valued leader in the field of education and healthcare for the needy, including refugees and sought after as a speaker.
Education

AIL’s Learning Center (LC) program has been the lynchpin of our vision and continues to expand. In 2017, the 43 LCs in Afghanistan provided classes to 23,687 students (16,025 female, 67.6%). Two new centers were opened in Mazar-e-Sharif. The classes cover a wide range of subjects from academic and preschool to income generating skills. All students also receive lessons in health, human rights, democracy, leadership and core values such as respect, responsibility, trust and peace. The centers act as women’s networking places creating a safe, social environment where friendships are formed and problem solving takes place.

A center reported this story which illustrates the power of education to transform lives, “One of our Literacy Class graduates started her own literacy class for illiterate girls in her home. A number of neighbors joined the class and she teaches them what she learned doing the course at the center. She is very happy in her new life as a teacher. She said it is the result of the efforts of those who taught her and Dr. Yacoobi and AIL for founding centers that provide such opportunity to people. She said, “I was able to help myself and now can teach others to read and write. I am learning more and study to reach a higher level so I can help others do the same.”
Tailoring is a popular class in all LCs where it is offered. Women want to learn how to make clothes for their families but they also want business, communication and accounting skills to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses. In 2107, there were 2,339 women and girls taking tailoring classes.

"Rabea was in school till 4th grade but then had to leave because her family did not agree with her continuing with education. “I have always dreamed of being an independent woman. So I attended AIL’s tailoring class after obtaining my husband’s permission. He is disabled with problems with his feet, so he cannot work and earn income for our living expenses. It is vital for me to work because my family and children need food, so over the years I looked for housework jobs near home.

I have been learning tailoring for about six months now at the AIL center. Two months ago I got a part-time job at a big company in the city where I sew simple clothes for children and receive some money. I am still trying my best to improve my life and I opened my own business. I started to sew clothes for my neighbors who come to me to sew their dresses. In this way, I have built a reputation among the neighboring households and gain income.

I thank Professor Yacoobi and my tailoring teacher who helped me keep my home and family together. I hope every poor woman has the opportunity to learn at an AIL center."
The Mobile Literacy Classes for women and older girls turned in remarkable results for the year. This class teaches literacy through the use of mobile phones and texting interaction between teachers and students. AIL developed its own guide and curriculum for the course, including over 2000 messages on a wide variety of subjects. The students learn life skills and educational messages through the texting subject matter. The phones also provide a means for social activity which helps reduce isolation.

There were 15 mobile literacy classes in 2017 for 519 female students. 211 students started the course with no understanding of letters and 136 were reading at first grade level with the other 137 somewhere in between. At the end of the 4 month courses, 429 students (84%) were reading at 4th grade level and 85 at 3rd grade level. Since 2013, there have been 1,906 students with 1,320 of them reaching the 4th grade in 4 months (a feat which can take up to 18 months) and 303 reaching 3rd grade level.

Sakena’s observations about the Mobile Literacy Classes. “The mobile phone texting keeps students working on and renewing their reading skills which means they reinforce the learning everyday as well as learning new things each day. If it was not for the mobile phones they would stop after a while or get disheartened or bored without a classroom or teacher to prompt the. The texting enables them to be very creative learners and do different things with their phones such as learn mathematics, so business, manage money and household budgeting. Other subjects they use the phone for include planning saving and investing of money, teaching husbands and children to read and do math. The reach of the mobile literacy class goes beyond the students who attend.”
AIL is also involved in helping Afghans recover their cultural identity. Classes are offered in traditional arts and crafts such as carpet weaving, knot weaving, tile making, calligraphy, miniature painting and silk weaving. AIL has one center at Herat’s Citadel. This center focuses solely on arts and crafts. AIL also promotes Afghan poetry at its Love and Forgiveness conferences and poetry is incorporated into learning at LCs and in schools.

**Health care and Health Education**

AIL maintains two fixed medical clinics in Kabul and two in Herat. In 2017, AIL expanded its outreach medical clinic operations from 3 to 5, adding clinics at 2 LCs as well as the long standing sites at an orphanage and street children facility and the Yacoobi Foundation LC.

Each clinic provides medical treatment, reproductive health services, nutrition care, preventive care and health education. The Herat area Community Health Worker program continues supported by AIL clinics at Jaghartan and Maladan in 14 village posts.

In 2017, AIL served 231,554 patients and gave health education to 174,466. AIL has always combined its high quality health care with health education. This breaks the cycle of ill health that holds families back. All clinic patients and their families receive health education at every visit.

In addition, AIL runs intensive health workshops. In 2017, there were 10 multi-day Reproductive Health Workshops for 319 women and 10 Expectant Mother Workshops (EM) for 97 pregnant women and 97 caregivers. Afghanistan has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. The EM workshops provide women with reproductive education and information on the care and raising of their infants. This has led to significant and positive changes. In the past 7 years, 99.8% of women (who reported a birth) chose a clinic/hospital site with no maternal deaths or stillbirths reported. Since 2012 none of the reported births have taken place at home. The women pass on the knowledge they gain to friends and family, thus extending the influence of the workshops far beyond the 1,028 pregnant women who have received direct benefit since 2010.

Sakena visits clinics whenever she can. “I see that people are much healthier and they are eating nutritious foods and are taking care of their hygiene and that of their children. Even though they are poor and unable to afford meat, they have learned how to combine different legumes and vegetables to get all the vitamins, minerals and protein they need for a balanced diet. The result is they are living healthier lives. The people have also learned about all aspects of reproductive health; how having fewer children is better and to space out births. This leads to a better economic situation for the whole family with enough resources to go round and for all to lead a better life. More children go to school and are better fed, thus able to concentrate in school; more education means they will have better opportunities in their future. Women learn about safe pregnancy and birth practices so the risks are reduced for mothers and babies.”
MIRA Project

AIL received a grant from ZMQ Development Organization, India to implement the MIRA Project in Afghanistan through January 2018. The project aims to reduce maternal/infant mortality rates by using mobile phones to keep track of pregnant women, monitor their prenatal and postnatal health, as well as providing vital health information on such subjects as vaccinations, newborn care, family planning and adolescent girl health. The project also seeks to make mobile technology women friendly. This increases the decision making capacity of women as well as enabling improvements in health. AIL has trained and closely monitors its health staff as they assist poor, rural women to use the phones and health apps and record the data.

Training

In 2017, AIL provided workshop trainings to 3,275 people (2,349 females, and 639 adolescents). There were health workshops for 1,162 people (1065 female, 228 adolescent girls) and capacity building workshops for 648 (318 female, 28 adolescent).
AIL continued its work with empowering women to be leaders and included men in leadership training. AIL held workshops in multiple subjects related to leadership for 1,465 people (966 female, 383 adolescent girls). This program included 13 leadership workshops as well as many other subject workshops such as peace, women’s empowerment, rule of law, women’s self-reliance, violence against women, human rights and democracy. One of the Leadership Workshops was in a rural, very insecure district, where AIL has built trust with the community and was also able to provide teacher training seminars this year.

AIL continues to hold a two-year high school Leadership Course at one of Dr. Yacoobi’s private schools in Herat. Workshops are also held on public speaking, love and forgiveness and citizen rights for students in various high schools.

One Herat leadership workshop in October was held in cooperation with NAB TV for 50 participants (27 females). The workshop consisted of college students, Learning Center students, social activists, and organizational workers. The objectives were to improve the leadership talents of the country’s youth and to increase their level of skill at public speaking. The 10-day workshop consisted of training and competition and was broadcast on TV all 10 nights.

In the competition phase, 22 (7 female) participants gave 3-5 minute presentations and were judged by a high level jury. Topics of the speeches included: empathy and sympathy, women’s
rights under Islam, the role of journalists in society, the role of youth in politics, the sweetness of a Dari poem, brain drain from the country and coping with stress. Eight speakers (5 females) were chosen to continue competing in future weeks.

Sakena had this to say, “The Leadership Classes give people confidence so they are able to voice their opinions, debate, apply for jobs and hold positions of responsibility. I have seen people take on jobs such as governmental posts, teachers, school principals, organization heads or become leaders in their communities, organize women’s groups, lobby for voting and other rights. I want to share with you that the impact is great in the life of people. People learn how to love, share, respect, commit to a cause, value things and take responsibility for their own lives and in wider society. “

Teacher Training

AIL provides quality teacher training and ensures its trained teachers get continuing education in methodology but also other topics. In 2017, AIL was one of only 14 organizations in Herat licensed by the Ministry of Education to provide teacher training for the next five years.

AIL trained 1,158 teachers (711 female) in 2017. 688 teachers (402 female) attended teaching technique seminars. 96 teachers (73 female) attended workshops on such topics as: leadership, peace and acceptance, role of women and self-reliance, computers and health. 370 teachers (233 female) attended mini workshops on topics as diverse as: justice, staff morale, new teaching methods, lesson plans, public speaking, pedagogy, law, tailoring, student psychology,
sexual harassment, women’s role in peace building, education sector problems, violence against women, advocacy and eliminating illiteracy.

One of the requests for teacher training that AIL received was from a very insecure rural district. The community wanted high quality teachers but many organizations were fearful of setting up programs in the area. AIL responded to the request by putting on a workshop for 36 men; unfortunately cultural attitudes prevented female teachers from attending. The men ranged in age from 23 to 63 and were teachers at secondary and high schools or were from the education department. There are 68 high, intermediate and preliminary schools in the district and 3 are girls only.

This 10 day workshop has made a huge difference to the level of teaching skill of the participants. The topics covered included: goal setting, lesson plans, the characteristics of a good teacher, student psychology, question setting, exams and variety in teaching methods. It was a great accomplishment for AIL to be invited to put on a workshop in as insecure a district as this and to have the workshop be a great success. The men left the workshop with new skills, ideas on how to teach and greater motivation.
Women's Defenders Project

AIL opened its legal clinic in Herat in 2015 with a team of five experienced, female lawyers. The office was moved in 2017 to AIL’s Herat office building for safety reasons. The Women Defenders Project assists women introduced through the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Human Rights Commission, as well as women who hear about the project over the radio or through other means.

Women, who are very poor, are represented for free. Others pay as they are able. In 2017, the legal clinic had 16 cases carried over from 2016 and 101 new cases. 118 cases were resolved during 2017; 111 cases were decided before a judge and 7 cases in negotiation. Topics of the cases included the following: murder, robbery, divorce, kidnapping, VAW, traffic accidents, business, inheritance, child abuse, alimony, early marriage, drug trafficking. In addition to advising and defending women in court cases, the lawyers in the project also speak on Dr. Yacoobi’s Radio Meraj informing women of their rights, educating people on the laws of the country and responding to call-in questions.
Support for Radio Meraj

Dr. Yacoobi’s radio station, Radio Meraj, which is housed in AIL Herat’s offices and partially supported by AIL staff, continues to be very popular. Based on surveys and feedback from listeners, Radio Meraj’s programs, which are broadcast 18 hours each day, reach at least 2 million listeners in Herat Province. The programs are primarily educational and informational, with a number of opportunities for listener feedback and questions; the station averages at least 175 calls, text messages or emails each day. Although only in its second year, Radio Meraj continues to win awards, winning three top awards in the Herat Local Festival for Zonal Best Media. 161 media outlets competed and each were allowed to enter in three categories. Radio Meraj won awards in all three categories that it entered--for best news, best analysis and speakers and best innovative programming.

* Sakena believes broadcast media can make a profound difference in society. “Radio Meraj helps people from many different backgrounds. Many of our listeners do not go out very often or very far from home because there is no school to go to or they lack the money for transportation or there is no transportation for them to use. These people especially women can stay at home taking care of house and family but still learn by listening to Radio Meraj.

We are offering them news, current events, educational and health programs, but we are also teaching them about their rights as human beings, as citizens. They learn how to get help from AIL’s legal clinic. Afghanistan is a poor country and there is much violence against women so helping women, through the radio, learn about their rights is beneficial to them.”

Support for Private Schools

AIL also provides technical assistance (teacher training, curriculum development, leadership training and other staff assistance) to Dr. Yacoobi’s four private schools. The high quality of its programs has resulted in the schools receiving excellence awards from the Ministry of Education. The 2-year Leadership Course continues to be popular and beneficial to students who learn about all manner of leadership topics as well as other subjects such as English, politics and democracy and community projects. They do course work, reading and presentations and engage in field trips such as community clean ups and visiting Radio Meraj.
Technovation Challenge 2017

The Prof. Sakena Yacoobi (PSY) High School students, with advisory support from AIL, worked on a coding project and entered the 2017 Technovation challenge. In May, they won first place in Afghanistan! Every year, Technovation invites girls from all over the world to form teams, learn coding and apply the skills needed to solve real-world problems through technology. Girls, ages 10 to 18, identify a problem in their community and create a mobile app solution to address that problem. The teams then learn how to communicate these ideas and translate them into a full business proposal.

In 2017, 36 groups from schools all over Afghanistan entered the competition, with 18 being chosen to present their apps. This was the first year that a team from PSY High Schools participated. The team was assisted by mentors from AIL staff. PSY High School’s winning team created an education app called Amozgar. It is a literacy learning mobile phone application that teaches illiterate individuals how to read and write in a user-friendly and effective manner. The idea being that the inability to attend classes or school should not prevent people from learning to read and write. The girls worked on the project for 3 months creating alphabet, sentences and audio and visual features. Their motto, “With Amozgar we change homes into schools.”
Emergency Aid

AIL provides emergency food aid when it is needed. Natural disasters can strike at any time such as drought or floods and extreme cold weather. These present challenges for the poor whose ability to get by is already running on a day by day basis. AIL is able to help with supplies of oil, beans, rice, meat and bread. Recipients are identified by the leaders in the local communities where AIL works.

Projects in Development

Sakena has long held a vision of opening a women’s university with an emphasis of training women to be leaders and of running a TV station for AIL educational programming. To facilitate this vision, a new addition has been added to the Herat Office Building. The new offices will have space for Advanced English classes for women preparing to enter the university and will also house TV Meraj, which is in the final stages of preparation. Equipment has been purchased and programming and videos are being created. Staff hires are in place and government permits applied for. We hope the station will begin broadcasting very soon.
AFGHAN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING
FINANCIAL STATEMENT
2017

INCOME $1,479,675

EXPENSE

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Total $1,219,576
With Gratitude

We could not do this work without your help. Afghans are transforming their lives and communities step by step. AIL will continue to be there for them helping in whatever way we can.

My staff make me proud. They are dedicated, talented and compassionate people who hold a vision for a better country for all Afghans. They are supporting Afghan women as they step up to take a more active role in family and community. Afghanistan will be rebuilt by the courage, resourcefulness and hard work of people like them.

The future is brighter because of our young people who are open to change, open to learning and to being creative, problem solving and self-reliant in a modern world.

Thank you for your support.

Sakena

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, CEO