

The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women

NEWS & Events

From the Founder

I have just had the great fortune to once again visit the land of our students: Afghanistan. Like before, security alerts in the news had me wondering if I should travel, and once again I was met with the reality that bad news sells. Contrary to what one reads in the news, Afghanistan is the same as I found it last year with regard to safety. People conduct their lives just like you and I, family, work, busy, hopeful. I certainly knew that I needed our students as interpreters when I went walking on Chicken Street, but thank goodness I was able to shop and walk around and admire the handcrafts of this great land.

I would wish that the news conveyed the whole picture of what has improved in Afghanistan over this year. There is lots of new construction including a multi-block high level hotel. In addition many new malls, homes and other normal growth projects of a healing city are progressing around Kabul. Last year one noticed lots of rubble from 30 years of bombing that needed to be cleaned up. This year the streets look more orderly and much of the debris from the wars is gone.

Certainly life continues to be very difficult in Afghanistan. The cost of living in Kabul is very high and the salaries are very low. Families are having to move out of their apartments because of rent increases. This unfortunately is occurring because the foreign workers are able to pay higher rents causing economic housing increases that families cannot afford. A typical family of a student in this program earns about \$500 monthly and spends most of that in rent. A visitor would hardly know of this struggle since Afghan people are the most gracious hosts, and are very optimistic people. All of the families live with the hope that they will be able to pay their bills, educate their children and add in whatever they can to the growth and reconstruction of their county.

Our eight new students are so bright, motivated, resilient and ready to begin studying at their host universities in the US. I was very impressed with this group of eight! They will add lots to their respective campuses and they are enthusiastic about meeting their fellow students from around the globe. I visited many of their families during this visit. Once again I felt the great hospitality of these families who are so grateful to this program and the schools offering scholarships to their precious daughters. A feast was served along with warm conversation at each of the students' homes. As I mentioned last year, even though the students' living situations are minimal, there is lots of love inside the walls of their homes. These are families who are in need and will benefit by the success of their daughters!

During this trip Libby Anderson, a board member, and I interviewed about 20 new candidates, qualifying 12 of them assuming their TOEFL test (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores are high.



Some of our new students

It is amazing that all the candidate's transcripts, CV's and English skills are strong. These students either lived during the last many years as refugees in Pakistan or housebound in Afghanistan during the Taliban. All the IEAW students and future candidates are dedicated to returning home post graduation. We hear repeatedly that their family and country mean everything to them.

We can all work to solidify more scholarships for next year and continue to grow this important program!

I am back in the office changing all of our literature since our family has grown! It is my pleasure to make these changes. The year ahead for the IEAW looks very positive and exciting. I look forward to visiting with all of our new students at their universities. It is always a pleasure to meet the great people who are on the front line in welcoming our students.

All of our hearts must feel very warm knowing that we are providing higher education to the deserving women from Afghanistan! Thank you all for being a part of this great adventure.

All my best,

Paula Nirschel



Highlight...

Nadima, shown here with her mentee Sarah Caldwell, recently received the Mentor of the Year Award for her work tutoring inner city youth through the Roger Williams University Bridge To Success program.



Washington, DC in May

White House Visit

Mrs. Laura Bush hosted The Initiative to Educate Afghan Women students at the White House on May 16, 2005. The students visited with Mrs. Bush about their experiences during their semesters at American universities and their future goals. Mrs. Bush has been actively involved in promoting the rights of women in Afghanistan, traveling to the country in March 2005 and meeting with students pursuing careers as teachers. In addition, she organized a roundtable at the 2004 G8 Summit featuring the IEAW program.

Lunch at the Treasury

Jim Fall III led the Treasury Department in their effort to help the financial systems in Afghanistan over the past year. It was there that he found out about the IEAW and contacted the director saying he believed in the effort and wanted to help. He has been a great supporter ever since. Jim arranged a lunch at the Treasury with key people for the students to eat with and learn from. Everyone who attended was so kind and interested in our students. They were welcomed to return another time and visit with some of these financial leaders of our government!

Georgetown Fundraiser

John and Nina Richardson feel strongly about the US educating Afghan women. They opened their home for a very successful fundraiser in Georgetown. This was one of the greatest fundraisers since a majority of the students were able to attend. The students were in DC en route to Afghanistan. There were about 40 people who attended, chatted informally with students and then listened with great interest while the women talked about Afghanistan past and present. They also talked about their aspirations after they graduate. Nora Cameron, Nina's sister, gave the students an unforgettable stay at her home during the DC visit. Nina is currently working on a documentary showcasing the success of the IEAW!



Photos

1. James Fall III, and the IEAW students
2. Lunch at the Treasury: (l to r) Larry McDonald, Director, Afghanistan Task Force; James H. Fall III, Deputy Assistant Secretary; William Baldrige, Deputy Director, Afghanistan Task Force; Russell Munk, Deputy General Counsel. Not pictured: Tim Adams, Under Secretary for International Affairs; and Randall Quarles, Assistant Secretary for International Affairs
3. Nina and Nora with students in Nora's yard
4. DC Fundraiser at John and Nina's home



Anahita is a research assistant for AREU, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.



Alean Haider is working as a Legal Assistant with UNAMA, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Summer Jobs

A key part of this program is that the students return summers to work and help with the reconstruction of their county.

The students' jobs compliment their majors and add to their classroom education with this summer experience of on the job training.

They normally hold key positions in agencies because of the demand for educated women in these roles.

These women know the need for them returning summers to give Afghanistan the professional skills that they have been developing at their universities in the US.



At UNAMA, Alean works in the office of the special representative of the Secretary-General, in Legal Advisory Unit.



In Her Words by Rabia Zahir

I cannot find the words to express my extreme gratitude towards this Initiative to Educate Afghan Women. Like every scholarship holder/candidate in this program, my family and I are overwhelmed with thankfulness for their academic and emotional support.

I believe that I am mentally prepared and persistent enough to excel at any endeavor. I will take full advantage of this golden opportunity to ameliorate and empower myself with knowledge and experience to be of service to the war-torn/war-stricken people of my beloved country, Afghanistan. I have developed the compassion and commitment that will drive me for years to come.

Thanks to this program and Duke University, I look forward to my future with great anticipation, knowing that the time has finally come for me to realize my dreams.

Rabia is a freshman at Duke University.



Left to Right: Muska's summer host parents, Michele Cox, director of international programs, and David Kitchen, assistant dean in the school of continuing studies for strategic planning and summer programs; Muska Assad: Marilyn Hesser, senior associate director of admission; Nuray Grove, director of the English as a Second Language program; Happy Herbert, ESL tutor; Uliana Gabara, dean of international education; and Mark Rhodes, core course tutor.

Muska Attends Summer Language Institute

The University of Richmond offered Muska the opportunity of attending their summer English as a Second Language (ESL) program to help make her transition to studying in the US positive. They gave her the best care when she arrived at their campus. She was picked up at the airport by Uliana, the International Dean, and spent time at her home. Muska then settled into life with her summer "family" Michele and David. Michele is the director of international programs. Days were spent attending classes, doing class assignments and touring Richmond with Nuray who is a Muslim woman and the ESL director. This IEAW student was received in the best possible way by all the caring people at the University of Richmond!

Visit to Afghanistan, Summer 2005

Families



Sights



Photos

1. Mothers and daughters
2. Rabia's family
3. Three generations
4. Sadiqa's family
5. Gul and her father
6. Zohra's family
7. Sousan's family
8. Frozan's family
9. Libby with Adela and her family
10. Princess Lema, Fatima Gailani and Princess Wana
11. Chicken Street
12. Boys on a bus

Contributions are received through our web site at www.ieaw.org
Requests for information regarding the Initiative should be addressed to Paula Nirschel at the following e-mail: pnirschel@ieaw.org

One Old Ferry Road • Bristol, Rhode Island 02809-2921
Phone: (401) 254-3300 • Fax: (401) 254-3855