

Faces of Peace

Saving a War-Torn Childhood

Volume 13

Issue 1

June 2014

Afghan program renewed

By Maida Carter

After a hiatus of five years Project Life has successfully re-established its service and care for children from Afghanistan. The Afghan branch of Project Life began in 2002 with the arrival of four Afghan boys and continued uninterrupted through the 2007 summer program year. During its five year duration, under the guidance and care of committed volunteers residing in both the United States and Afghanistan, the program touched the lives of 24 Afghan children. Christopher Wilson, Project Life's International Relations Director, gladly sat down to answer a few questions about the program's re-establishment in 2013 and its future plans.

I asked Chris what hurdles had been overcome to facilitate the participation of two Afghan boys in the 2013 summer program. "The volatile security situation in Afghanistan coupled with the deaths of two key local, supportive elders ultimately halted the Afghan branch of Project Life in 2007," Chris said. "Fortunately last year with help from Javed Ahmadzai, Samiullah Lal (*Project Life 2002*) and other dedicated supporters, two Afghan boys were chosen to participate in the program. They were granted visas and traveled to the United States directly through Kabul." With new partnerships reinforcing existing ties the hope is that the Afghan branch of Project Life will blossom once more.

Chris spoke about the two young boys who participated in last year's summer program. "There could not have been two more deserving orphans," commented Chris. Jahan Zib, age 10, and Nasratullah, age 11, came with extensive medical needs and downtrodden spirits. Both boys live with their widowed mothers and a sister sibling. "Project Life is not a medical program, however that being said, its mission is to heal the whole child and that includes the mind, body and spirit," Chris continued. By the grace of God the Project Life family succeeded in doing just that.

Chris relayed the future plans for the re-established Afghanistan program. "Last year was somewhat of a pilot program," he said "Going forward the hope and intention is to build upon our new foundation and gradually expand the program to include more children." The continued expansion of the program will hopefully allow for Afghan girls to participate more freely in the program as well. Afghan girls have a greater chance of attending the program if they travel with a male sibling. As for this year's summer plans, Project Life fully anticipates the arrival of four Afghan boys, thus continuing the tender and meticulous care for these children in the second consecutive year of the renewed Afghan program.

Coming this summer...

Project Life is sponsoring six orphans from July to September this year. We welcome two girls from the conflict zone in the north Caucasus region of Russia, and four boys from war torn Afghanistan. We wish them a wonderful visit!



Jahan Zib and Nasratullah of Afghanistan enjoyed fruits of local harvest last October in Waterport, NY and below, spent a day at Albion Elementary School



Open road ahead for caring young Afghan graduate

By Maida Carter

Her journey began with her arrival to the United States on July 19, 2004. Now Fauzia Ajan, a former participant in Project Life program and current staunch youth volunteer, will be receiving her diploma from Lyndonville High School in June. This is an accomplishment worthy of celebration. Fauzia spent part of an afternoon sharing with me some of her life here in America and what she hopes for her future.

“Staying here in America has been a real blessing,” Fauzia says. “My life would not have been filled with many of the opportunities I’ve been fortunate to receive here.” She named a few examples, including the pursuit of an education, participation in sport activities such as soccer, nurturing her joy for music, and her active support of community service.

Along with her involvement in extracurricular activities, Fauzia has also excelled in her studies. She has completed three college level courses to round-out her high school career. These courses have earned her credit towards college general education requirements in subjects Fauzia enjoys most--Math and English.

It comes as no surprise that she ranks among the top 10 in her graduating class, for which she recently received a Top Ten Award. This is an achievement that is without a doubt the result of her perseverance and commitment. In addition to the latter award, Fauzia received a commendation at a May 8 2014 Youth Awards Banquet for her community service.

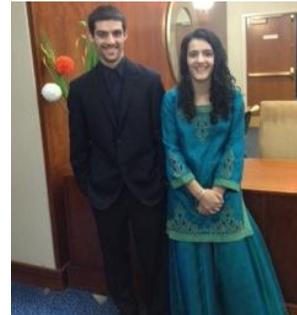
Fauzia has kept close ties with Project Life and over the years has maintained a loyal, continuous participation in the summer program regardless of her competing priorities. She has always set time aside to give back to the orphan children during the summer months. “A person’s life can change from one gesture of kindness,” she said. Fauzia’s life is a testament to this truth.

She holds deep gratitude and appreciation for Project Life’s mission and everyone involved who has positively touched her life. “I am truly grateful for the all the help my brother and I have received from the Project Life family and friends.”

Fauzia, together with her older brother Sabir participated in the 2004 summer program of Project Life. When their mother and then their father died, they lived under the guardianship of relatives back home. Both are thriving after their decade in the U.S. Fauzia intends to continue her steady and active

participation in Project Life, having found much contentment in helping the later generations of orphan children in the program.

So what is on the horizon for this bright, caring spirit? Fauzia plans to pursue a degree in Education at Daemen College, Amherst, NY, and gladly anticipates a visit back to Afghanistan. Truly the world is her oyster. With her dedication of spirit and willingness to strive, the future is an open road awaiting her first steps.



High school senior Fauzia and brother Sabir attended fundraising gala in April

PROJECT LIFE WAR ORPHANS

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WHOM DO WE SERVE? Orphaned children of war and civil conflict. Children are 9 to 12-year-olds with high socio-economic, psychological, and emotional needs. All children live with family members in their home countries. We do not select children from orphanages or seek permanent fostering or adoption for them in the United States.

WHY? We aim to provide peace and support for each child’s rest and recuperation from trauma. Our program improves physical and psychological health, builds trust and confidence, and inspires new hope.

HOW? A three-month program of education, recreation and health care, along with hosting by volunteer American families in the western New York region. All children return to their families overseas at the completion of the program period.

FUNDING: Entirely from private donations. Please help! Total program cost per child is about \$4,500.

Gavel Club meets challenges, soars at fundraising gala



By Harris Lieberman

Over the past few years Project Life has been soaring to new heights, propelled on the wings of *The Voice* Gavel Club of Markham, Ontario. On April 26 the Club held an ambitious fundraising event on behalf of Project Life at The Novotel Hotel, Toronto. The multifaceted event seamlessly combined an auction, fashion show and elegant dinner, ultimately yielding an astonishing \$17, 426.26 for Project Life.

Though extremely busy with preparations and delegation of tasks during the event, Club President Jack Ding accepted my invitation for a brief interview. "We want this event to help more orphans be served by Project Life. We want to help as many orphans as possible," Ding explained. Ding also expressed his desire for the Club to volunteer at Project Life's main base of operations in Waterport, New York. While there members thought of teaching the orphans public speaking skills to build their confidence and social abilities, as a form of therapy.

Club V-P Priscilla Wu shared her written reflections shortly after the Gala event:

"Winston Churchill once said, 'We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.' Having had the opportunity to serve my peers, the orphans, through *The Voice* Gavel Club's Humanitarian Leadership Project over the past two years, I have considered this experience as one of the life-changing accomplishments in my life. Starting off with an ambitious dollar target, our team, which was comprised of solely 29 youth members, was faced with many challenges and doubts throughout this journey.

We were discouraged by many, who told us that such an event would be too difficult for such a small group of youth to handle. Yet despite the lack of faith and struggles, one of the greatest things I learned from this experience was the power of perseverance and the spirit of team dynamics. Inspired by the teachings of the Project Life members, we were motivated to stick together and to support one another through all obstacles. We worked towards a common vision and

the passion that emerged from each member is what ultimately helped us achieve our goal.

As we are a public speaking and leadership group, I was proud to see each member honing their skills to make a difference in the world. It is always easy for one to say that they are a competent communicator or leader, but demonstrating it is another thing.

Although we were not able to convince everyone, we challenged ourselves to take risks, and to go beyond our potential in order to raise awareness and raise funds for the orphans. In the end, the greatest gift we received from this experience was that we as youth were able to learn the importance of giving, a life lesson that will remain with us forever.

Believing that we could make a difference through our endeavors, we proved our ability to achieve the 'impossible', something that only the power of youth can accomplish. This journey had allowed me to experience the true beauty and happiness of giving. Being able to teach school peers and the community the different values that I had learned through such a challenge, I was ultimately able to inspire others to take initiative and to reach out to an even greater audience."

Below: Gavel Club members visited Project Life's Waterport HQ March 22



For more information and pictures from the Gala, please visit *The Voice* website at <http://www.thevoicegavelclub.com>

Project Life says thank you to all

Project Life succeeds due to the dedication of volunteers of all ages, as well as donations from a large and diverse array of individuals, congregations, and organizations. A big thank you for their efforts during the 2013 program goes to health care providers, especially Dr. William Cosman.

Visit to Caucasus helps build enduring friendship and trust

By Deborah Wilson

Project Life has been hosting war orphans of the Caucasus since 1998. Director Linda Redfield Shakoor and resident Art Therapist Dena Adler traveled to the Caucasus in May to explore the effects on the orphans' lives. They met with Project Life graduates in Nazran, Ingushetia and Grozny, Chechnya.

The theme that came up over and over again is the importance of continuing the friendships that begin during the summer program. Making regular visits to the children once they return home helps increase the level of trust as the years go by. As well, volunteers can hear firsthand from family members about the changes they have observed.

Alikhan Akhilgov, regional director of the Caucasus program, said Project Life goes far beyond the actual time in America. "Simply, people have to be friends and stay friends."

Zalina and Aishat returned to their homes last September. Their families said that they had concerns about their children going to a foreign country. Yet now that she has returned home, Zalina often exclaims, "My America! My America!" Her excitement is reassuring to the family and helps to set a new understanding of the country she visited. Zalina's mother said, "Now we know who you are and you know who we are."

Seeing more of the world last summer helped Aishat come home and focus more on her school work. Her family said that she now has a real interest in English and Geography because they have become more meaningful to her.



Umar, right, helps newcomer Jahan Zib with English vocabulary last summer

Umar and Ramzan also returned from the program last September. Before the trip, Umar was bullied at school and frequently engaged in fighting. Now he beams when talking about his interest in baseball and how well he played the sport. Umar's uncle said that he is much quieter and more settled now.

Ramzan learned a lot of English which has earned him a prize at school this year. His aunt says he is more confident and more peaceful. She mentioned that at first being in America was hard for him due to homesickness.

Many of the adult guardians mentioned that they initially felt it was dangerous for their child to travel so far away. "We often describe the children as 'brave' for coming on this 3-month trip. Yet one of the mothers said 'It is not an issue of bravery. It is a matter of trust.' Guardians feel that the foundation Project Life has built with the region's orphans is secure" said Dena Adler.

Magomed's (2011) family said it was the first time he had experienced playing in parks and fishing. They said that the program's emphasis on friendships, therapeutic recreation and learning is "better than any psychologist." They added life in Ingushetia as difficult and that adults do not always get the time to play with their children. Magomed said that prior to travelling he was afraid of Americans but now he knows "People are better there than I thought."

Director Linda Shakoor mentioned that "Full orphan Linda (2010) still asks about her little host sister who was only 2 years old at the time of her visit. She was touched by the gifts she received from her host family in the States and whispered in her quiet way to please send them her greetings."

Many of the children are now part of the English Clubs at their schools. They have access to Skype, various apps and social networking sites, so it is easier to sustain relationships. The English skills they gained in the U.S. are helping them keep the ties alive.



Orphans Zalina, Aishat, Ramzan, and Umar along with Waterport volunteers visited Jerry Samet and Youth Leaders International friends in D. C. area last August