

Faces of Peace

Saving a War-Torn Childhood

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Orphan gains health, strength during year

Thirteen-year-old orphan Mohammad from Afghanistan has seen huge improvements in his health since he arrived in August 2014. At that time he was very ill with a life threatening form of anemia called thalassemia.

Specialists at Children's Hospital of Buffalo removed his spleen in November 2014. Prior to the surgery Mohammad had big problems with hemoglobin levels. Now his body is able to use the blood he receives every three weeks very effectively.

Mohammad was tiny for his age before the surgery, but has grown rapidly since then. When family members back home see him via Skype, they say they don't recognize him as the same child!

Removing potentially harmful excess iron from his system remains a challenge. He has to take drugs on a daily basis to help with this.

Aside from going every three weeks for transfusions, Mohammad travels to Buffalo often to see specialists. He also had dental surgery in September to remove several of his molars. He manages all these trips quite cheerfully and is always full of questions and curiosity about his situation.

Mohammad asked Project Life Director Linda Redfield Shakoor if she thought he could become a doctor. He said he wanted to be like his hematologist, Dr. Ambrusko, because he had saved his life. Mohammad said "I want to go back to Afghanistan and help save other lives."

The current routine of transfusions and drug therapy is not a cure. It maintains him but does not change the basic fact that his body will never be able to produce enough normal red blood cells on its own, to keep him alive.

There are promising developments in the field of bone marrow transplantation that could provide a permanent cure for his thalassemia. His doctors say that they would like to do a transplant for him in the not too distant future.



Tutor Deanne Borrie took this picture of Mohammad on a horse outside the Hoag Library in Albion last summer.

Coming up in 2016...

In the next few weeks two new Afghan orphans will have their long-awaited visa interviews at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. We're hoping that their applications will be successful so that they can join us in Waterport for Project Life 2016 which is planned to commence in late June.

New wheels for Project Life

Thanks to the generosity of our many donors and supporters, Project Life was able to purchase a very low mileage used 7-passenger van this month. The program has been without its own vehicle for more than a year, and we're delighted that those days are now behind us!

A van is essential to our summer program, when it is used daily for orphan and volunteer transport. As well, the van is needed to take Mohammad on his frequent trips to Buffalo for medical care.

A big thanks goes out to all our volunteers who pitched in and used their own vehicles during the months that we didn't have one.

PROJECT LIFE WAR ORPHANS

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Successful first months at school

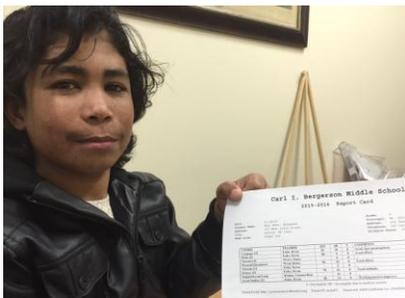
Mohammad’s education in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, was interrupted by his illness and by military activity in the area. During his first year in western New York his medical needs prevented him from attending public school full time, but he was tutored in English and Math regularly at home and at Albion Central School.

This fall he was finally able to register as a full time student at Albion. He was naturally afraid that starting school at age 13 in America would be very difficult. What if he was not able to “catch up”, what if other kids made fun of him, and what if he was older than his classmates? Many of these fears were put to rest when the Middle School arranged for him to be placed in a classroom of eight children who have similar reading and language challenges.

A big milestone for Mohammad was his first report card. He received almost all 80’s in science, math, social studies and language arts. This is a tremendous achievement for a war orphaned, ill child whose education was so sporadic in his homeland. He asked what every abbreviation on the report card meant and had never seen anything like it. He was very disappointed that some subjects such as English as a Second language did not receive a number grade. He really wants to know a grade! And he expects 100%!

Mohammad has found new friends, too. One classmate insists on calling Mohammad his brother and always wants to sit next to him. The teacher teasingly questions Mohammad’s friend saying, “Are you sure you are his brother?” The friend always insists that he is. Mohammad says “he’s not like my family brother, but he is like a brother because he is my friend!”

Just before Thanksgiving Mohammad’s eyes were wide with excitement when he first saw the huge kitchen in which he and others were to cook a meal to share with 82 Middle School students and staff. He received many compliments for the excellent rice pilaf he prepared.



Mohammad proudly shows first report card



Ingush volunteer Liuba tutored Mohammad summer 2015

High praise from caring teachers

(The following are excerpts from a November progress report prepared by CarmenRose Brittan, ESL specialist at Albion Central School)

Mohammad has made outstanding progress adjusting to our school’s life. He is a genuinely excellent role model for the other students. He has made many friends and is popular with everyone who knows him.

He is working at the sixth grade level in Math. Though he is naturally struggling with some of the material, he is succeeding in it, as he leapfrogs over the typical time needed to master all the math concepts and skills.

His home room teacher says that Mohammad has learned about and understood concepts related to cell biology. While scientific vocabulary can be difficult for him, he has memorized many of the long and complex scientific names for the various cell parts.

Mohammad has made very good progress in his reading skills. He is now reading at the first grade level and there is progress every day. His unusual maturity and the enormous value he places on his education is what makes the difference.

He took the lead in one of his Social Studies class discussions regarding the immigrant experience. His teacher says he is an enthusiastic participant in class discussions.

Carmen finished by saying that “He is a real delight to work with and is very easy to love.”

A different kind of donation...

At this month’s meeting of voluntary staff and host parents, we agreed that we’d recommend to everyone connected with ProjectLife that they **go out and donate blood if they possibly can. Please check for information at www.redcross.org**