

Faces of Peace

Saving a War-Torn Childhood

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Orphan remains in States for life-saving medical treatment

In early August three Afghan orphans arrived to join this year's summer program, having weathered an unprecedented delay when the entire visa-processing system of the U.S. Department of State crashed in mid-July. New orphans Iqbal and Mohammed settled in quickly with the help of returning orphan Nasratullah.

But in mid-August 12-year-old Mohammad collapsed at the home of his U.S. host family. He was soon admitted to Women's and Children's Hospital, Buffalo. Specialists diagnosed him with thalassemia major, a disease of the red blood cells. Thalassemia major is the most severe form of inherited anemia that a child can have.

It became very clear that Mohammed would not be able to return to Afghanistan with the two other boys at the end of the program season. Over the summer he was given multiple blood transfusions along with chelation therapy to help remove excess iron from his system.



Due to his illness, Mohammad's spleen grew to four times the normal size. Doctors said that much of the transfused blood was being trapped in the spleen rather than circulating through the bloodstream. After very careful preparations, he underwent major surgery on November 12 to remove the enlarged organ. Amazingly, almost the

entire procedure was done using just two tiny incisions in his abdomen.

Mohammed has a difficult road ahead. There is no cure for this condition. He needs expensive medications as well as blood transfusions every two to three weeks for the rest of his life. Eventually bone marrow transplant might be an option, but there is no certainty that it would work.

With doctors monitoring him closely, he's now well enough to catch up on his English lessons. It's unlikely that he will be able to return to Afghanistan in the near future. He is responding well to the warm welcome given to him by his host family, our volunteers, and all his caregivers at the hospital.

Funds urgently needed to support ongoing care

Many readers received our October mailing regarding young Mohammed's medical crisis. We send **A SPECIAL THANK YOU** to all who have made donations during this difficult time. We were very touched by the personal notes you sent inquiring about Mohammed.

We don't usually ask for donations so often, but the need is great. As well as ongoing medical and daily support for Mohammed, we must fundraise for a new van. Our trusty Dodge Ram had to be scrapped last summer. Having a vehicle has always been essential for all our activities during the busy summer months. It's even more important now that volunteers are making so many trips to the hospital.

Donations by mail can include one-time or once-monthly postdated checks. Online donations may be made with debit or credit cards, or by using PayPal at www.projectlife-wli.org. PayPal offers the option of setting up automatic monthly contributions, as well as one-time donations.

We'd be happy to keep you up to date on news about Mohammed via e-mail. Please send your e-mail address to plinfo@projectlife-wli.org to be added to the list.

Volunteers from near and far make orphan program tick

Project Life was fortunate to bring a total of five children to the summer program in 2014. Three boys from Afghanistan and two girls from the Russian Caucasus province of Ingushetia were the focus of our activities this year.

Many new volunteers contributed to the success of the program. Two university students from Ingushetia traveled with the two orphan girls. Liuba, 20, and Khava, 17, paid their own way to come to the States to volunteer with Project Life. With bilingual Liuba taking the lead, they became involved in everything from the weekday English classes, to weekly field trips, to the annual sightseeing trip to Washington D.C. In the evenings, they studied English along with other adults in World Life Institute's ESL programs.



Deanne Borrie works on English with Nasratullah



Liuba, 2nd from left, and Khava, center, Samson, far right, and Samuel, in front, all helped when the orphans visited Niagara Falls



Frank Lauter and Mohammed practice new words in the classroom

“It was a tremendous gift to have Liuba and Khava present,” said Director Linda Redfield Shakoar. “They helped Roza and Alima to acclimatize to their new surroundings. It really eased the orphans’ transition.”

From closer to home, residents of our local community also opened their hearts to Project Life this season. Teen host brothers Samuel and Samson Robinson were always on hand to help during the daily program, and have continued to support Mohammed, now a long-term member of their household, throughout the fall. Sabine Adler brought a special program that used guitar melodies to help the children learn new English words.

Deanne Borrie, a retired school principal, took the time to teach Tai Chi Chih movement classes to the children and youth volunteers during the summer months. This fall she spent several mornings a week working on ESL with the Afghan boys. Now she gives her time to Mohammed’s lessons. Frank Lauter, known by the orphans as “Mr. Frank,” is a retired engineer who gladly spent some of his summer mornings teaching Mohammed.

“The mix of ages among this summer’s volunteers was refreshing,” Linda said. “Project Life values the gifts that different generations can offer.”

Advanced ESL student Gloria Jasso, and Diane Biemans of nearby Carlton joined the program in September, working in the classroom with the Afghan boys after the Ingush group departed for home.

Linda, art therapist Dena Adler, the Ingush volunteers, and 16-year-old Project Life graduate Dali who was visiting the U.S. for the second time, visited Daemen College in Amherst NY. They were invited to give a presentation on Ingush culture and history to Russian history students there. The presentation shed light on a culture and nationality barely known to many Americans. The event was a first step in developing an ongoing exchange between students at Daemen and the University of Ingushetia. It is possible that more Caucasus college students will pay their own way to visit New York State in the upcoming years, if the idea takes off.

Project Life is striving to continue its mission to save the war-torn childhoods of children across different regions of the globe. Strengthening our collaboration with local and international communities allows our mission to reach new heights. It’s important for us to draw on the knowledge and breadth of experience brought to the program by all its volunteers.

International Director reflects on Afghanistan trips

(Project Life's voluntary International Director Chris Wilson talked about his travels to Afghanistan. In October this year he made his sixth trip to that country. He returned the orphans to their families, met with thalassemia patient Mohammed's mother and brother, and visited an eye specialist about orphan Nasratullah's chronic eye condition.)

Q. What impressed you most when you first went to Afghanistan?

A. Before my first trip I had terrible images of war whenever I thought of Afghanistan. But what I noticed most was that the country is very poor by our standards. I was very struck when I went to visit orphans in their homes at the lack of running water, electricity, phones, and how few cars there were. They live life at a very basic level, in mud huts with earthen floors covered by matting. The other thing that impressed me was the high standard of hospitality. Afghans are warm and generous without limits and if you are their guest they are very protective.

Q. Have you noticed changes over the years?

A. You don't see the signs of war, such as destroyed buildings and wrecked military tanks that used to litter the countryside, any more. The roads are well paved. Kabul has become a bustling modern city with signs of prosperity. It's clear that the average person's life is still very basic, but people do have cell phones and TV.

Q. What specific needs do the children of Afghanistan have?

A. Aside from lack of health care, the biggest challenge is that the education system is almost non-

existent. In many parts of the countryside the Taliban and other insurgents have closed schools. The only chance kids have for education is to go to a larger town or city where things aren't so vulnerable. One of our original Afghan boys from 2002 is now attending a technical university to become a doctor, thanks to the private help of individuals connected with Project Life. We'd like to see more of that kind of support for kids returning home from our program.

Q. Many of our supporters perceive it as very dangerous for the children and our volunteers to travel to that area. How do you respond to that?

A. Violence is not everywhere. Violent incidents occur only sporadically and in isolated areas. On a day to day basis our orphans do not feel threatened. Our volunteers benefit from travelling with local hosts who are very adept at avoiding danger. We trust that our purpose in being there is good and pray for the success and protection of our work.

Q. What are the prospects of bringing more Afghan girls to Project Life?

A. Though we'd love to see it happen, it's very challenging for cultural reasons. The families are very protective and unwilling to let girls travel. The two girls we brought in 2004 were rare exceptions. It's a very conservative society.

Q. What is the most surprising thing you saw on your recent trip?

A. The appearance of big shopping malls full of clothes and electronics in Kabul, the capital. And the level of contrast between the very few wealthy and the poor. I went to a meal in a private home that had lush gardens with caged birds and water pools that seemed like a mini-Arabian Nights. And not too far away on a narrow median in the middle of heavy traffic, a woman, child, and one-legged man were begging for help among the passing cars.

Q. What do the orphans' family members think about our program?

A. I had the opportunity to meet with extended families including Mohammed's mother on this trip. They consistently expressed their enormous gratitude to us for what we have provided while the children are here in the States. They told me they pray every day for the health and well-being of all of us here.



Afghans Mohammed, Nasratullah, and Iqbal enjoy view on the way to Washington D.C.

Bridging the distance...

Imagine at a tender age being separated from your mother by a very long distance of land and ocean. Mohammad has found himself in this very situation when he was diagnosed with thalassemia (see story page 1). He continues to benefit from state of the art medical technology for his care. This is 21st technology at its best! But wait, there's more...

Thanks to the generosity of friends, Mohammad's older brother was recently able to purchase a computer and internet access. This allows the family to communicate with Mohammad via Skype. His mother and siblings can now talk regularly with Mohammed and even "see" how he is doing here in the States.

"Indispensable" is how to describe a gift that eases the hardship of separation between mother and child. "This new development in Mohammad's life

is doing wonders for his emotional and psychological well being and in turn that of his family," says host mother Hana Robinson.



Hope comes in unexpected packages-- in this case, a computer. As the saying goes, "a picture says a thousand words." Knowing your child is alive and well is not the same as talking to him while seeing his smiling face. With the great strides made in modern technology Mohammed and his family are finding ways to stay close, despite the distance.

Our thanks to all who generously give medical services



Each year numerous doctors, nurses, dentists, and other health professionals provide services to improve the health of all the orphans. From the simplest ear infection or cavity, to chronic eye disease, to life-threatening illness, each child's needs are taken care of, often free of charge. We offer a big thank you to you all!

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 3-month program cost per child is about \$4,800. The Mohammed Fund requires \$1,050 per month to meet expenses.

