

Global Connections and Exchange Program: Afghanistan

Civil Society through Achievement:

The Afghan and American PreCollege Institute

1st Year Final Report

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Submitted by Stephen R. Brown

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**Students at GCEP Afghanistan Computer Lab
Bi Bi Aysha High School, Jalalabad, Afghanistan**

Executive Summary



The La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club Foundation (the Foundation) was approved for the Global Connections and Exchange Program for Afghanistan as announced in a letter to the Foundation (July 22, 2008). The award provided \$150,000 to operationalize activities as set forth in the Foundation's proposal.

Central to the Foundation's proposal was the establishment of computer labs at various sites in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, where high school boys and girls would receive computer training, access to the Internet and the opportunity to communicate with their peers in the USA. A common theme for student and teacher discussions would be the program as a precollege institute.

The Foundation contracted with Abdul Qaum (Almas) to be our in-country director to collaborate with the Nangarhar Director of Education in implementing the program at various Jalalabad sites. Sites were selected, computer labs were established and equipped, curriculum was developed, and instructors were hired.

On the US side our team worked with high schools within our Rotary District 5340 (San Diego and Imperial Counties, and Blythe in Riverside County, California) for implementation of the program. It was not necessary to set up computer labs or provide general computer instruction; these high schools and students are well-resourced for both.

A contractual arrangement was made with iEARN to provide a secure platform for GCEP postings by all participants. Our Master Teacher and our US Coordinator posted topics for discussion by all participants to our GCEP iEARN site every other week, and encouraged posts through interaction with the students.

Across the year, other activities took place in Afghanistan and the US that provided meaningful cultural exchange for participating students. In the final month of the first year, the Foundation hosted three Afghan GCEP participants in their training in San Diego.

The \$150,000 budget was fully expended after receiving approval of two no cost budget amendments; the cost share obligation of \$187,015 was more than fulfilled. The Foundation believes the program was extremely successful in its first year. We build upon that success as our GCEP enters its second year.

Narrative



Start Up

Almas was recommended for the Foundation's consideration by a trusted Afghan-American colleague working for a US-based program in Jalalabad. He was amply qualified, and hired. The Foundation had considered hiring another candidate, Mumtaza Adurazzakova, who had been in-country director for the GCEP run by Relief International. After a personal interview, obstacles appeared to her candidacy: She did not speak either local language predominantly used in Jalalabad, she showed reluctance to relocate to Jalalabad, and she requested about one third of the overall budget for compensation and living expenses.

Almas had extensive training in computer installation, utilization, software applications and teaching. He lived locally, spoke multiple languages (local languages included), had a pre-existing working relationship with Mr. Azizi (Director of Education, Nangarhar Province), and his compensation would be less than 9% of the total budget.



Immediately following his hire, Almas met with Mr. Azizi and obtained his full support for our GCEP (photo left: Almas, left, and Mr. Azizi, right.)

Almas surveyed the Jalalabad high schools with computer labs, to determine the feasibility of incorporating GCEP into their existing programs. No existing high school computer lab had Internet connections. Only the administration at the Jalalabad Rotary School was interested in having GCEP brought to their school. The other schools had programs sponsored by German and French organizations; they did not want to add GCEP to these programs. At this

time it was also determined that it would not be practical to bus students from their own school site to hub sites. This had been an earlier consideration.

Almas met with Dean Farnnullah of Nangarhar University's College of Education. Relief International had been using a building at the College of Education campus; Almas arranged to continue using it for GCEP. A contract was made for a new Internet connection there. Further arrangements brought in five proximate high schools to participate in GCEP at the College of Education Training Center (CETC). Almas rehabilitated the facility, and purchased additional computers. A trainer and IT specialist were hired to run the program there. The facility and instruction were made available on a limited basis to NU College of Education students.



Foundation President Steve Brown and representative Fary Moini traveled to Jalalabad to further facilitate implementation of GCEP in October 2008. They met with Almas and his initial staff, reviewed the program and its curriculum. They assessed five high school sites for potential inclusion in GCEP. Each of these visits with high school principals and administrators was approved and arranged by Education Director Azizi. Jalalabad Rotary School was selected as a GCEP site. It had a computer lab (left) but no Internet connection.

The other four schools did not have any computer labs. In each case, the principal presented a proposed classroom dedicated to GCEP. In all cases it was agreed that GCEP would be part of the regular curriculum for each school. Students needed to pass English proficiency exams to qualify for participation in our GCEP; such test-taking sessions are shown for two GCEP schools in the photos below.



Within a few weeks Almas rehabilitated the four designated classrooms, purchased and installed computers and related equipment, and hired instructors to provide computer training. A typical room rehabilitated by Almas appears in the before photo for Bibi Zainab High School (left).

The classrooms with all new GCEP computers pictured are: Bibi Zainab Girls High School (bottom left), Bibi Aisha Girls High School (report cover), Mia Omar Boys High School (bottom right) and Abdul Wakil Boys High





School (left).

Implementing GCEP in Jalalabad

Seventy computer work stations were established at six GCEP computer lab locations (Table 1). Classes were taught in one hour shifts, with six shifts per day per site. Each classroom had a GCEP teacher. GCEP had one IT technician service all sites. Almas oversaw GCEP at all sites, frequently visiting each site.

Table 1. Jalalabad GCEP lab sites and computers

| GCEP Site | High School | Number of computers |
|--------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Bi Bi Zainab | 10 |
| 2 | Bi Bi Aysha | 15 |
| 3 | Jalalabad Rotary | 8 |
| 4 | CETC | 17 |
| 5 | Mia Omar HS | 10 |
| 6 | Abdul Wakil HS | 10 |
| Total | | 70 |

Our Afghan GCEP students passed a mandatory English proficiency exam before becoming a participant. Once admitted to the program, their initial curriculum was an introduction to computers (3 hours), to MS Windows XP and Vista (5 hours), to Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint; 8 hours) and to the Internet and a paperless office (12 hours).

Students began posting to iEARN in their first week. Those who continued beyond the initial 28 hour curriculum learned advanced Microsoft Office, basic computer hardware, site membership (Exchanges Connect, gceafghanistan.ning.com, gcepbd.ning.com, tajikistan.ning.com, connect.state.gov, etc) and digital services, online libraries, and online searches.

During the year, Master Teacher Marla Federe and US Coordinator Cynthia Villis developed and facilitated online precollege and cultural topics for GCEP students via posting to our dedicated iEARN site. Participation by most Afghan students, and some US students, was excellent. Students quickly took the role of ambassador for their school, their city and their country, explaining history and culture, encouraging interest and questions. Perhaps most touching of all to students were those posts in which students shared true feelings about their families and their future hopes. From very different perspectives, students from each country see education and support from family and friends as key to their future.

iEARN GCEP discussion topics were posted by the Master Teacher and US Coordinator on our closed and dedicated iEARN site, Steps to My Future (September 2008- July 2009). This series encouraged our participants to bring their academic and career plans into sharp focus through guided questions, reflection, discussions, feedback, and projects. For *Personal definition of success*, Marla introduced the topic:

Post your thoughts on this question: How would you define “success”? I once had a student who told me that he was pretty sure he would never be successful because he didn’t like wearing suits and ties (formal clothes), carrying a brief case, or attending meetings. He said that he preferred to play the guitar and be surrounded by family and friends. Sometimes our society, community, friends, family have very defined ideas of success -- but are they our ideas of success? Will they leave us fulfilled?

There were 884 replies: Rahmatullah writes “success has more definition and is difficult to explain. That one who just failed, he knows the cost of success, and he knows how much sweeter (it is) to achieve success with a plan.” For Khan Wali, “the best definition...is (that) success is the completion of anything intended.” Later he writes “without struggle, is success possible?” Saboor Hamedi says: “Success means...knowing I do the right things for the right reasons; not compromising integrity; share with those who need my help; give my time to my family; live up to my commitments; build a community (not a network) and look in the mirror and like what (I) see.”

The Attachment to this report lists all discussion topics posted and the number of student replies to each.

A total of 615 Afghan students registered with iEARN, as did 14 Afghan teachers/trainers. The CETC facility alone supported students from six high schools: Cheknowri (boys), Tajrobawi (boys and girls separately), Shahid Muhammad Arif (boys), Nazo Anna (girls), and the NU College of Education. Ten of the NU College of Education students were girls studying to be teachers. Through external funding, the Foundation set up a computer lab with Internet connectivity at their dormitory.

GCEP student participants learned to use the Internet as a source of information and communication. Those who registered to iEARN actively participated in the postings. Participation by Afghan schools includes students who did not register with iEARN (Table 2).

Table 2. Afghan GCEP Participants by School and by Gender

| High School | Males | Females | Total N of Students |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Bi Bi Zainab | 0 | 210 | 210 |
| Bi Bi Aysha | 0 | 112 | 112 |
| Jalalabad Rotary | 190 | 76 | 266 |
| CETC | 259 | 49 | 308 |
| Mia Omar | 170 | 0 | 170 |
| Abdul Wakil | 182 | 0 | 182 |
| Grand Total | 801 | 447 | 1248 |

Not all Afghan students stayed in GCEP for the entire academic year, partly due to the substantial demand of students waiting to participate, and partly due to the finite number of GCEP computer lab seats available. One hundred students did participate for the entire year (Table 3).

Table 3. Graduates of Year-long GCEP by High School and Gender

| High School | Males | Females | Total N of Students |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| Bi Bi Zainab | 0 | 17 | 17 |
| Bi Bi Aysha | 0 | 26 | 26 |
| Jalalabad Rotary | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| CETC | 16 | 11 | 27 |
| Mia Omar | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Abdul Wakil | 9 | 0 | 9 |
| Grand Total | 48 | 54 | 102 |



A well-organized GCEP graduation ceremony was held in Jalalabad (August 2009; left). Those in attendance included the Nangarhar Education Directorate staff, College of Education faculty, GCEP team, Jalalabad Rotarians, GCEP student participants, high school teachers and principals, and representatives from NGOs. A total of 115 guests and dignitaries were invited to this first ever GCEP graduation ceremony.

One of the more interesting precollege activities enjoyed by all participants was posting photos of people performing their eventual desired vocations, after the students had completed an online assessment of their skills and interests. Afghan students took the activity one step further: They role-played, and posted to iEARN photos of themselves in the careers of their choosing (photos below).



Implementing GCEP in the US

In the US, meetings, presentations, and follow-up communication took place with several schools and student groups. Most schools were reluctant to build GCEP into their curriculum, but would encourage students to participate on their own as an after-school activity. Several schools expressed interest. Schools that achieved significant student participation in GCEP were the Kearny High/University of San Diego Upward Bound program, Mission Hills High School, High Tech High International, and MAAC (Mexican American Action Council) Charter School. Many more schools expressed an interest in participating, but high school faculty failed to follow through, even after significant follow-up.

A sample of one school's active participation: In addition to participating in precollege activities on iEARN, and taking part in two GCEP-related conference opportunities, 25 Kearny High/USD Upward Bound students (right):



- Enjoyed an evening of Afghanistan in San Diego with three visiting Afghan faculty from Nangarhar University, who presented a PowerPoint on their culture. The evening ended with conversation over Afghan snacks of almonds, grapes, naan, and sweet treats from a local Afghan restaurant (July 2008).
- Learned about international education opportunities from Betsy Davis, Division Chief of Youth Programs, US Department of State, at their Kearny High School library (October 2008).
- Saw photos of Jalalabad city, surrounding countryside, culture, education, and civic needs, and talked about international careers, with a physician member of San Diego~Jalalabad Sister Cities, who had recently traveled to Jalalabad (January 2009)
- Interacted with two visiting GCEP teachers from Jalalabad during their San Diego training. The two teachers attended a festival of short subject films created by the Kearny/USD UB students, then visited with them in a discussion circle (July 2009)

Over 185 US students registered with iEARN, as did 29 US trainers or teachers. Over 11,000 separate posts were made by our GCEP students from both countries to our program-dedicated iEARN site during our program's first seven months. In addition, in the first year our students and staff posted 200 photos and 32 PowerPoint presentations in our GCEP iEARN album. US participants who engaged in iEARN reported developing friendships, cultural awareness, and increased interests in international education, languages, and issues.

Since much of the US student participation was outside of supervised classrooms, it is difficult to measure its extent. As will be discussed, new efforts are underway to increase US student participation.

Activities outside the classroom in Jalalabad

Jalalabad program administrators created opportunities in line with our GCEP stated goals outside of the classroom, once the program was up and running smoothly in the classrooms. Examples included:

- GCEP students enjoying a college visiting day at Nangarhar University, where they were addressed by NU faculty and had the opportunity to interact with NU students.
- GCEP students attending events at the Jalalabad Lincoln Center, and making presentations including 1) a celebration of Global Youth Services Day, 2) Mother's Day, and 3) Environmental Protection Day
- Students at all GCEP schools participating in community service and environmental activities such as tree planting, cleaning their school grounds, or refurbishing a classroom.
- Students at each GCEP school holding memorial services for GCEP student Waheed Momand, who drowned during recent flooding as he attempted to rescue a neighbor in distress.

Activities outside the GCEP classrooms in San Diego included

- Global Leadership Connection, a two day conference in which eight GCEP high school juniors learned about international service opportunities and leadership from those in the field.
- Expanding Your Horizons, a math and science conference for 500 girls in grades 6-10 (including 10 GCEP students). Participants learned about education for girls in Afghanistan (right) from their college mentors and from a video, solved science problems involving Jalalabad throughout the day, and as a closing activity prepared 25 murals sharing symbols of science



and good will to send to GCEP schools in Jalalabad. This event was covered by the local television media. Murals were distributed to GCEP Jalalabad schools, with special presentations about their preparation (May 2009).

- Los Angeles Time reporter Tony Perry visited our Mission Hills High School GCEP, and reported on it as part of a front page article about the Foundation's programs in Afghanistan.
- Our US GCEP leadership team met with iEARN Founder Peter Copen, and reviewed the use of iEARN in GCEP.

Afghan teachers travel to San Diego

The Foundation hosted three Afghan English teachers from Jalalabad for one month (Tabasom and Wahida, right).

They traveled to the US as a Rotary Group Study Exchange Team led by Nangarhar University Medical School professor and member of the Rotary Club of Jalalabad, Dr. Basir Mangal.

The team stayed with Rotary families and friends during their time in San Diego. The three English teachers successfully completed a 3-week course at San Diego State University (SDSU) concentrating on Teaching English to Speakers of Foreign Languages. They received specialized instruction on the use of technology to teach English, using the technical resources of SDSU's Language Acquisition Resource Center. As part of this program, they interacted with several Nangarhar University English professors attending an SDSU summer institute to improve their English teaching skills.



Tabasom and Wahida met with the GCEP students at Kearny High/USD Upward Bound for their precollege summer program's film festival – they were met with applause, bouquets of roses, and an outpouring of warmth. After the films about 20 of the students stayed for a round table discussion of culture and education with the two women teachers.

Ashoqullah (left) did not return to Afghanistan, choosing instead to seek asylum in the US. For more information about this unfortunate circumstance, please contact Foundation President Steve Brown directly.

Additional US GCEP activity

US Coordinator Cynthia Villis and the US team spent substantial time in collaboration: Notifying supporters that our GCEP had been funded, setting up the iEARN page and registrations, training students in use of iEARN, setting up the GCEP website, meeting with the Master Teacher and setting the curriculum for the PreCollege Institute, meeting with potential participant school administration, student groups and their adult leaders to encourage involvement in GCEP, sometimes hundreds of miles away (Palo Verde High School in Blythe), sometimes as many as three times, with email follow-up. Liaison with participating students and teachers continued throughout the year, including invitations to precollege events. Presentations about GCEP and its progress were made to individual Rotary Clubs and at District Rotary events, local and national Sister Cities International meetings (Long Beach, June 2009; Kansas City, July 2009), and an appearance on the San Diego television show *Shades of San Diego*.

In addition to local activities, Cynthia met twice with our program officer in Washington DC, and had the opportunity to present our GCEP to Department of State staff. She also hosted Betsy Davis, Division Chief of Youth Programs (US Department of State) who in her brief conference visit to San Diego spoke with our Kearny HS GCEP students about study abroad and international careers, and also visited our GCEP participant MAAC Charter High School.

Challenges and Opportunities

A challenge we recognized well into the first year of our GCEP was how to keep the program running in Jalalabad during the summer. The temperature often rises to 120 degrees and most facilities have no air conditioning. Through funds available from Rotary, the Foundation was able to install air conditioners at all GCEP sites, add additional generators at each site, and have sufficient funds for the additional fuel. Accordingly, the program continued to have strong participation during the summer months.

Initially we were concerned that there would not be sufficient English-speaking Afghan students for strong participation in GCEP. English taught in the public schools in Jalalabad is limited, but there are

many private institutes teaching English, and a major one is free. Many of our GCEP students have participated in these private English programs. One exception: The female students at the Rotary School do not have a well-qualified female English teacher, and that school is located away from the city center where the private English classes are being taught. Though girls at this school did participate in our GCEP, their English was not sufficient to graduate from the program.

It took longer than desired to have the Afghan GCEP participate in activities outside of the classroom. Although the proposal the Foundation submitted did not provide for these activities, this type of participation was desirable. Contact was made with the Jalalabad Lincoln Center for participation in some of their activities. Further attention was paid to international tribute days, with encouragement for GCEP students to have activities focusing on these days. Finally, it took some time for the GCEP students in Jalalabad to develop a sense of community awareness and responsible citizenship. In the second half of the first year of the program, our in-country director organized several of these types of activities with strong student participation.

On the US side, we were disappointed in the lack of follow-up on participation in GCEP by several high school administrators. We were led to believe that several schools would be participating; much of that enthusiasm failed to convert into student participation. In part this was due to the schools' inability to fit GCEP Afghanistan into their existing curriculum or clubs.

We have addressed the US participation issue by making presentations to Interact Clubs (high school clubs sponsored by Rotary Clubs), inviting their members' participation. To date the response has been strong, and we have better mechanisms to follow up with these clubs through their presidents, Rotarian advisors and school club advisors.

We believe that using the NING website and Facebook platform will result in more US participation. Most US high school students use Facebook. Although many US schools block access to Facebook through school computers, the bulk of the US participation will still be through outside of school activities with the use of home computers. We found that the iEARN platform offered a good starting point, but our students found it too difficult to track and respond to messages. It was also inconvenient for our administrators, thus discouraging supervised activity on the US side. We are well into the process of transitioning necessary enrollment, training, content, and media for GCEP to Facebook. Further, the NING site is being better utilized than in the past.

The Foundation is beginning to focus more sharply on the sustainability of GCEP after its third year. We understand that if GCEP is to continue in Afghanistan after the Foundation's third year of operation, there will be an open competition. Simply proposing to continue the program we have established may not be sufficiently competitive to win a further award.

There are three major challenges for the sustainability of our GCEP; all related to cost. One cost is the monthly cost of Internet connectivity. We believe that we have made arrangements for USAID to pick up this cost starting in a few months; this funding will likely continue for two or three years. We hope that the Afghan government will find sufficient value in GCEP and other Internet-based programs in its high schools to eventually fund this cost.

A second significant cost is fuel for the generators. We have been advised, many times, that solutions are just around the corner: The turbines at the dam are being rehabilitated, or electricity presently being used in Kabul will be diverted to Afghanistan as inter-country agreements come, online bringing electricity to Kabul from the north. Hopefully something will materialize soon.

The third and final cost issue is funding the salaries of trainers. A well-qualified IT trainer commands a salary of \$300 per month or more. The typical salary of a high school teacher is much less than that. Perhaps a training program can be put in place so that our trainers can train existing or future teachers on how to continue GCEP. The Afghanistan Department of Education could build those salaried positions into the salary structure of the education system.

In any event: By the end of its third year, GCEP Afghanistan will have trained thousands of Afghan high school students to use computers, access the Internet and use electronic communications. They will have experienced firsthand the value of using these tools to get to know people in the US and around the world. GCEP will have inspired the interest of hundreds of US students in international events, careers and world community service. Thousands of students are learning that they can touch, and have touched, the lives of friends in another country.

These experiences last their lifetimes. We hope that they will share these experiences with their families, friends and colleagues throughout their lives.

Respectfully submitted,



Nov. 23, 2009

Stephen R. Brown
President,
La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club Foundation

Date

Attachment: GCEP Afghanistan Master Teacher Posts

- 1. Getting to know each other (5315 posts)**
- 2. Personal Definition of Success (884 posts)**
- 3. Open Chat: Thinking about Spring (2063 posts)**
- 4. Steps to My Future: What are your strengths? (2344 posts to 7 steps)**
 - 1) Reflect on our previous discussion.**
 - 2) Explore your personal strengths and skills (440 posts)**
 - 3) Explore your personal preferences in terms of professions (485 posts).**
 - 4) Share what you found with your family and friends (546 posts).**
 - 5) Tell us about one profession that interests you (343 posts).**
 - 6) Post a photo or picture (225 posts).**
 - 7) Refine your personal definition of success (305 posts).**
- 5. High Tech High International GEO Project (4369 posts in 4 categories)**
 - 1) Meeting Daily Needs (730 posts)**
 - 2) Global Education Outreach Project (22 posts)**
 - 3) Getting to Know Each Other (3017 posts)**
 - 4) Environment and Geography (600 posts)**
- 6. Jalalabad's Lincoln Center Events (34 posts).**
- 7. Jalalabad on the Silk Road (46 posts)**
- 8. Current Events (109 posts)**

Note: GCEP Afghanistan posting excerpts available from staff upon request