



the linda norgrove foundation

Summer 2015

Welcome to our interim newsletter, which we send each summer to more committed supporters and regular donors.

In March four of us travelled to Afghanistan to meet up with Doulat and Amy, who have been working for us for a year now, and to visit the projects we are supporting. It's clearly important for us to visit so that we better understand the issues surrounding the projects we fund. We hadn't been for three years but last autumn was an unstable and dangerous time in Kabul, our family remains concerned about Afghan trips, and yet again we decided against going. Over the winter things appeared to improve, we reconsidered and 6 weeks later we were there.

Last minute decisions can often be good ones and we were lucky to hit a time when there were no significant incidents. This trip wasn't as tense our last, just over a year after Linda had been killed. On that occasion we had been accompanied by a film crew, the US military presence was obvious and we travelled with minders and often in armoured vehicles. This year's visits were more informal and we were hosted by Afghans who are used to living with the constant dangers, having known no different. Our impression was of a country getting on with 'life as normal' rather than one living in a war zone.

It wasn't a 'jolly'; we remain resolute in our determination to keep overheads low and we each paid for our own fares and expenses. We were fortunate that Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, our partners for the Afghanistan Reads! project, made their guest flat available without charge.

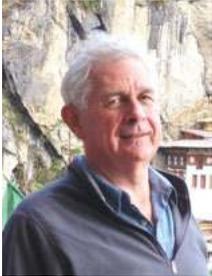
For Lorna and I, it was good to meet with Linda's colleagues from the time she worked for the UN and to spend some evenings with her Afghan friends. Bitter, sweet but ultimately healing.

It's dispiriting that, since our trip, there has been an increase in ethnic kidnappings and beheadings and more heavy fighting as local Taliban have been reinforced by ISIS, Chechens and other fanatics from the old USSR. Western troops have left and now others with an interest in disrupting a return towards 'normality' move in. Our sympathies are with the everyday Afghans as they try to live normal lives and bring up their families.



www.lindanorgrovefoundation.org

David Green gives an outsider's view of the LNF Afghanistan Trip



I was invited with my partner, Carola, a trustee of LNF, to join John and Lorna on their visit to Kabul and Bamyan in March. I went with some trepidation, but also with a sense of great excitement. It would have been easy to have found

reasons for staying at home, but it promised to be a remarkable adventure, and a real learning journey, and that's what it turned out to be. I did have a role – my experience of working in higher and further education had value as so much of the existing and potential work of LNF is education-related. But I am not part of LNF, except as a supporter of two people who have acted with great dignity and a desire to be a force for good in the wake of great personal loss.

I won't dwell on the personal experience of travelling to Afghanistan. It was challenging and edgy; it was ultimately rich and rewarding. I learned about people and communities that need and deserve support, as they struggle to make their way in an impoverished and war-ravaged country. I learned some things about myself. I learned a great deal about LNF.

LNF approaches the distribution of its funds with a desire to do the most good for the greatest possible number of people, tempered with a caution born of the knowledge that the trustees are directly responsible to all those people and organisations who do so much to raise the funds in the first place, as well as to the potential beneficiaries. They have found a niche in the welter of agencies and charities working in Afghanistan, and work on the basis that they work primarily with small projects, or to add value to the work of other well-focused and well-managed organisations with low overheads and effective local staff.

LNF makes every effort to ensure that funds are used for the purposes for which they are intended, and with measurable outcomes that are agreed in advance and reported to the LNF trustees. By being there, on the ground, in the dialogue with beneficiary organisations and individuals, I was able to observe at first hand that there is a commendable and reassuring rigour in this process that has been hard learned and honed by the trustees, and which, I can vouch from experience, is communicated with clarity and force, if required.

But the overwhelming sense over the ten days of the visit was of a Foundation that has already been hugely influential, through intelligent engagement with other organisations both within and outside Afghanistan, by careful husbanding of its limited resources, by avoidance of duplication of effort, and by being motivated to achieve change in the lives of women and children in particular.

Whether in a snow-bound village in the Central Highlands, at the Afghan Children's Circus, in the Window of Hope orphanage, or with a room full of enthusiastic and articulate women students who have been able to access law or economics degrees because of LNF, there were smiles, laughter, mutual interest and admiration, evidence of a real engagement, well-mediated by Doulat, LNF's programme manager in Afghanistan. The optimism, commitment and willingness of Afghan people to undergo hardship for outcomes and experiences that we take for granted in the UK validated, for me, the tremendous effort of LNF's trustees.

I will admit that as I was leaving Dubai for Kabul on the outward journey, my thoughts were on the anticipated sense of relief I would undoubtedly feel on the return journey. In the end, I left Kabul with real regret that we were leaving so soon, and a desire to get more involved back home to help LNF and the Afghan people we met.

This newsletter is a joint effort: inside, each of the three Trustees who went to Afghanistan has contributed a report on a project visit. Below, the other two Trustees, and John and Annelise who manage our website and social media, explain how they became involved with the Foundation and what continues to motivate them. There's no one else; these seven volunteers run the Foundation.



Jane Cumming

I'm always curious about what motivates people to give to a particular charity or volunteer for a particular cause. It often comes down to something very personal – either your experiences or the people you've

met. The water industry was my link to the foundation as that's how I met John, Linda's dad. One of our ex colleagues asked if I would help manage the media in the aftermath of Linda's death.

I had never met Linda, yet the memory of her funeral will be with me for ever. Desperately sad as it was – and even some of the normally hard-bitten reporters were in tears – it was also uplifting. I still recall a quotation from the ceremony "The value in life lies not in its length, but in the use we make of it." John and Lorna's determination that something good should come from this tragedy continues to inspire me.



Thomas Fisher

John and Lorna were the first friends Julie, my wife, and I made on the Outer Hebrides before settling on South Uist. I had been a development worker in India for almost a decade, specialising in rural employment.

At a professional level, I know just how challenging it is in countries like India and Afghanistan to achieve developmental outcomes to address poverty, and am full of admiration for the organisations the Foundation supports that

manage to achieve so much in such difficult circumstances.

On a personal level, I am struck by the surprising similarities between Scotland's remote islands and land-locked Afghanistan: the mountains and the hills and the close-knit communities, without which remote Scottish islands and the many far remoter areas of Afghanistan would not survive. No wonder Linda fell in love with Afghanistan and its people.

John Conway and Annelise Jespersen



We knew John and Lorna through mutual friends and had met Linda once at a New Year's Eve Dinner where we talked to her about her work with the World Wildlife Fund in Peru.

We were very touched by the Norgroves' decision to start the Foundation and were keen to offer any help we could. We had skills that we hoped could help them – John C creates websites, and Annelise is a website editor and social media enthusiast. We knew that an online presence was crucial for a small charity to show its work and keep in touch with supporters.

Although we wanted to help John and Lorna on a personal level, we get great satisfaction from contributing to something that we can see is having a very real effect on people who have suffered so much and benefit from the Foundation's support.

Bamyan Valley – Afghan Tranquillity

John Norgrove reports on the novelty of being able to walk around in Afghanistan

Travelling to Afghanistan need not be so dangerous providing one follows advice, which is not to walk on the street, not to go out at night, not to travel by road outside cities and to avoid insecure areas, which for us means most of the country.

One exception to these rules is the Bamyan valley, a half hour flight northwest of Kabul. Bamyan people are predominantly from the Hazara ethnic group and look similar to Mongolians. The valley is flanked on one side by the Koh-i-Baba mountains and on the other by the Hindu Kush and there are only a few high passes in and out. Having suffered terribly during the Taliban era, the Hazaras ensure that these passes are strongly guarded and the security is good enough to allow one to visit the bazaars and country areas relatively safely.

We spent three days in Bamyan, partly to monitor an environmental and women's livelihoods project managed by a local Afghan charity COAM and partly for the experience of being able to walk around and relax in Afghanistan.

On our second day we visited the project site, driving up until the snow stopped us in a 4 wheel drive and then, wearing second hand \$8 snowboots purchased from a 'shoe shop' in the bazaar, a 'half hour' climb, which turned out to be over two hours in bright sun through deep snow at altitude. Some of us were fair knackered.

At the village, which turned out to be the highest in the valley, at 3,200m, we met with what appeared to be the entire population and were taken in to the village meeting hall to be force-fed. We saw the tree nursery, discussed the seed exchange and visited the orchards. Such beautiful scenery and peace made it feel more like Switzerland of 1850 rather than present day Afghanistan.

The return trip was easier, arriving back at a hotel occupied by participants in the fourth international Afghan ski challenge. Afghanistan is definitely a land of contrasts!





Afghanistan Reads! Literacy classes for Women

Accompanying CW4WA staff
on a monitoring visit in Kabul
by Trustee Carola Bell

Our largest programme, Afghanistan Reads!, which has been funded by a grant from US-AID, has been undertaken in partnership with Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan (CW4WA). They run the programme and have an excellent understanding of literacy needs and how to tackle them. Building on their experience from previous literacy projects they take a very practical and open approach, adapting and adjusting their methods as they progress.

There are literacy classes being run 5 days a week in 21 different places. The girls are all over 15 and have never been to school, although some go to the Madrassa where they learn passages by heart. Courses include life skills, health and hygiene, as well as literacy and numeracy. Small libraries of books are provided to encourage the girls to keep reading after their course, lest they lose the skills.

The main challenge faced by CW4WA has been the training of the teachers. Even following training, some would naturally revert to teach by rote learning and the girls were memorising texts, but not able to recognise words. Each class has one main teacher for literacy and numeracy and the selection, training and sometimes retraining of these teachers was a vital part of the project.

Lorna and I were able to join them on one of their unannounced monitoring visits. Once we'd left Kabul's main highways, our driver found his way skilfully through what to us was a maze of narrow streets to our destination, in an outlying district. There had been a bit of snow and the streets had muddy potholes, but when you come from the Isle of Lewis mud doesn't worry you too much! The drive took about 45 minutes and we entered a rather chilly building where 28 girls, mostly in their mid to late teens, sat side by side on the floor against the walls of the small room. Pages from their exercise books with Dari words written on hung on lines of string around the walls.

After some introductions the lesson continued and the girls settled back into their work. Their bright faces glanced towards us shyly as they did sums and made sentences, laughing if a friend made a mistake and always keen to try again using their new skills.

It was so good to see them enjoying the company of other young women and their enthusiasm to learn. But the realisation that they are about the same stage in learning to read, write and do sums as my little granddaughter back home, who is at least ten years younger than these girls, was hard to think about. I wondered what their future would be. Not much chance for any one of them to get a full education but, if they can retain the basic literacy skills, they will always be in a better position to take any opportunities that come their way. Maybe realistically not many will be able to continue their education and few will ever have a 'good job'. The one sure thing though is that most will very soon be mothers and that their new skills will transform their children's futures.

The Window of Hope Disabled Children's Orphanage

Report by Lorna Norgrove

John's and my last visit to Kabul and the Window of Hope orphanage was three years ago but as soon as we entered this home for children with disabilities this spring I immediately recognized several of the children. It was great to see them again, and to instantly sense a much happier and more homely atmosphere.

The Window of Hope orphanage was one of the very first projects we supported after we set up the Foundation in 2010. Since those early days, the home has gone through difficult times but over the last couple of years the Linda Norgrove Foundation has joined up with Enabled Children Initiative (ECI) and the Karen Woo Foundation to give stability to the home by sharing the running costs. Lael Mohib who set up ECI, lives in Kabul with her Afghan husband and has been the driving force behind many of the improvements.

There are currently 10 children being cared for in the orphanage by seven members of staff. All of the children have mental and/or physical disabilities and two have cerebral palsy requiring 24/7 care. Frozan who, together with Naseer, manages the home and is the main carer, is herself disabled. She was also brought up here but is only now, at the age of 21, starting school and receiving childcare training.

I can't express how impressed I was with the home. The work that is being done is fantastic and the orphanage has improved no end. The children are being cared for well, fed better, given medical treatment where necessary and a classroom has been set up so the kids who are able are now doing art work, reading and writing. Two wee ones rattled off the English alphabet for our benefit and much to our surprise!

Not all of the children in the home are orphaned. Some have been abandoned by their families, left on the road with nowhere to go, basically because their parents don't know how to look after them, and many can't afford to keep someone who can't contribute to the family's income. It's hard for a mother to imagine what it must be like to be forced to give up your child because of lack of support or not having enough money for food.



Some of these children are taken to the Window of Hope unexpectedly so room is always kept for such an eventuality. Two weeks before we visited, police brought a little girl called Fatima who they'd found left at a shrine in a province north of Kabul to the home. She appeared to be suffering from malnutrition and trauma, crying most of the time, only calming down when she was held or covered by a blanket. Siavash, a volunteer, gave her comfort and she's improving and it became so apparent to me just how important well-run homes like the Window of Hope are, particularly in a society where families do not have the education or wherewithal to cope with a child with special needs.

Our visit to the home was the most moving experience of my trip and I do so hope that we can continue to help these vulnerable children for as long as they need us.



SCAWNO school buildings

SCAWNO – an afghan charity succeeding in an Afghan way

Report by John Norgrove

We included an article about Scawno in our last newsletter but make no apologies for writing about this project again. When we started funding Scawno in 2012, they were struggling as the Afghan benefactor, who had started the centre and had been financing it, had died.

They run classes for kids in judo, calligraphy, Koran, computing, English, and sewing/tailoring classes for women.

We provide around 70% of their funds, the balance coming from private Afghan benefactors. Their accounts have been poor, their reporting could have been better, but we have continued to receive glowing reports following inspections by our monitoring staff.

After visiting ourselves we can see why. Their premises are run-down, overcrowded and the overall feeling is somewhat Dickensian...but there is such a feeling of optimism and of making a real effort to improve things. They're trying to achieve lots with a relatively small budget and they are succeeding. Their judo classes are really popular and over-subscribed, some of their students have won competitions. We met an enthusiastic cheerful lady teaching in a small room crammed full of women tailoring and

sewing skills in the hope that they will be able to supplement their meagre incomes. We saw the fantastic calligraphy and art skills that are being taught. It was all so uplifting and made us realise that the Foundation really is helping to improve many people's lives.

Over the past few years we've come across some large western charities with ridiculously high internal costs who prepare very polished applications for funding but whose results in Afghanistan are minimal compared with what Scawno achieves: year round classes to over 300 kids and twenty women for about £430 a week.

So we'll accept the iffy accounts and reporting meantime whilst helping them to improve - we're paying for training for their finance staff. We're increasing their funding to allow them to expand into the house next door. When asked how we might help the women graduating from the sewing classes to start a small business, we were told that a grant of around \$80 to buy a sewing machine would make a real difference and we're considering this. We have started organising an exhibition of their calligraphy in the an Lanntair arts centre in Stornoway. Proceeds from sales will go directly to purchase of better quality inks, paints and paper.

Real changes to real lives ... not paperwork. This has to be what we're about



News Roundup

NEW PROJECTS THIS YEAR

New projects started this year include a four year programme of providing libraries to 12 girls schools in conjunction with the Womanity Foundation (\$2,700 a year); 18 'kindergarten' schools for over 450 children in Herat province managed by War Child, a two year £27,000 project funded in partnership with the Body Shop; \$15,000 emergency funding to the Afghan Children's Circus to help them cope whilst they adjust to the disappearance from Kabul of one of their regular funders.

On-going: scholarships for 2 medical students, 22 students at the Gawharshad Institute and for 7 poorer schoolchildren, classes for over 300 children at SCAWNO, 10 operations at the French Children's Hospital, midwifery clinics, 3 drinking water tanks for rural villages... the list goes on.

Thanks for the fund raisers and to you donors for making all of this possible.

2015 FUNDRAISING

Over the last six months funds have been raised for the Foundation by:



- The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool at their annual Christmas Day buffet
- Hebridean Housing Partnership who ran a Quiz Night in Stornoway
- Pupils at Beeslack High School, Penicuik, and Plockton High School
- North Uist ladies who held a fundraising tea in Sollas
- DAI's bazaar in Washington DC
- William Thomson who ran the Boston Marathon

AND DON'T FORGET the Uig 10k which will be held on the 3rd of October 2015.

Join us, or DAI in Washington DC, or walk or run with friends or on your own wherever you are in the world on the day.

If you would like to make a donation to help transform the lives of women and children in Afghanistan, please complete this form together with your donation and send it to:

The Linda Norgrove Foundation, 3 Mangersta, Uig, Isle of Lewis, UK, HS2 9EY.

Your help is greatly appreciated, however you choose to help the foundation.

Full Name:

Address:

.....Postcode:

E-mail:

I enclose a donation of: £

If you would like to know more about setting up a monthly donation please tick this box:

Please check contact details are correct (full name and address), and sign the Gift Aid Declaration below if you wish for your donation to be treated as Gift Aid:

I want the Linda Norgrove Foundation to treat all donations and all future donations as Gift Aid donations.

You must pay an amount of UK Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax that the charity reclaims on your donations in the appropriate tax year (currently worth 25p on every £1 you give).

Signed:.....

Date:

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