

Case Study: From “man of the family” to eager school boy



Omid, holding a photo of his father

He roamed the streets of Herat to rummage in other people's garbage and took anything that he could find to sell to feed his mother and 3 other sisters (the eldest of whom is 13 and the youngest 7). Being the only son, Omid assumed the role of the family breadwinner and had to become the “man of the house” when his father, then working for the Afghan National Army, was killed by anti-government elements when Omid was just nine years old.

Today, Omid (at 11) is still working the streets of Herat but now selling biscuits and chewing gum in the afternoons, as his mornings are spent at Saifi School for Boys as a 3rd grader. War Child UK (WCUK) and the Linda Norgrove Foundation worked to re-integrate him into the government-run school in March 2012.

"I dream of becoming a doctor so I can help other people who are in need. When I was 7 years old, I envied those children with their school bags, going to school every morning. I always imagined myself being with them in a classroom and playing with schoolmates."

In April 2011, while Omid was having another usual day of working on the streets of Herat, he came upon two outreach workers from Sanayee Development Organization (SDO), one of WCUK's implementing partners under the broad "Poverty Reduction and Community-Based Social Protection" project of the European Commission, who encouraged him to enroll into one of the project's resource centres and to work towards enrolling into government-run schools. The grant from the Linda Norgrove Foundation (LNF) is supporting the work with the 3 government-run schools identified to build the capacity of 60 teachers, School Management Committees (SMTs) and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members on teaching methods for working with former street-working children as well as on more general topics such as, child protection and psychosocial care. With LNF's support, 147 street working children are currently reintegrated at the 3 local schools in Herat: Saifi, Faynab and Farook. As of September 2012, 48 of the target participants including those from Omid's school have been trained on further understanding the dynamics of street life and the effects it has on street working children thus leading to a better understanding and proper handling of reintegrated students.

WCUK have made sure that the re-integrated students are equipped both academically by providing a 9-month literacy, numeracy course as well as life-skills training to our beneficiaries; as well as materially by giving them back-to-school kits consisting of a school bag, and the necessary stationery.

"Before SDO found my son, he was too difficult to handle, [he was] almost always out of my sight but now he is a good boy", said Omid's mother. A sentiment confirmed by SDO's outreach worker, Nasima Tahiri, who has been documenting Omid's case and his transformation from a street child to a well performing student.

Now, Omid goes to school every day. As excited today as he was on his first day as his classmates and teachers continue to support him. From the weekly visits he gets from the SDO outreach worker and WCUK's Junior Project Officer, Omid is encouraged all the more to stay in school and is intent on working towards his dreams.

"Our life is still difficult but people around us are very helpful. My uncle helps us financially too. I am hopeful that I can pull my family out from poverty through my education. I am thankful on how the management and teachers of Saifi School haven given particular attention to my learning," quips Omid.

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