Welcome to our tenth annual newsletter

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Our strategy of enabling individuals to improve their often desperate situations has proved successful in many ways. We’ve done this by highlighting their circumstances in newsletters and emphasising that every penny donated gets to Afghanistan.

In the last ten years over £1.7 million pounds, mostly private donations, has been sent to people in Afghanistan but the money, whilst important, tells only a small part of the story. To us, it’s more significant that the lives of thousands of women and children have been transformed.

Whilst we still support small projects, around half of our expenditure now goes towards scholarships for women to study at colleges and universities. We pay the fees for 157 women now and anticipate increasing to 200, including 100 medical students, within the next year. We’re mindful of the need to keep sufficient funds in reserve to continue support until our students graduate. 

There is a huge demand for this support – when we advertised nursing/midwifery scholarships in Bamyan this summer, there were over a hundred applicants. After we’d selected 10 students the rest withdrew their applications to study, presumably because they couldn’t afford the fees of £180 a year. It costs little to change a woman’s life and, in the future, the lives of her children.

At any anniversary, one looks forward as well as back: after another ten years, we will both be over 80. As LNF grows the workload intensifies, but our capabilities inevitably decline and the day will come when these two lines on the graph cross.

There’s no way we would stop when so many lives depend on the Foundation so we will look towards employing someone to help. ‘Every penny gets to Afghanistan’ has been and, in the future will continue to be, an important part of LNF’s attraction so we’ll be on the lookout for a donor to help us to pay the wages.

We know that those women and children whose lives have been improved are incredibly grateful for your help. To all of you who have contributed towards the success of this Foundation over the past 10 years – thank you.
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**2021 Calendar**

As this is the 10th anniversary of the setting up of the Foundation, our trustees and volunteers were asked to choose their favourite pictures from over the last ten years. There were many overlaps, the images showing a side of Afghanistan and its people not seen in the media in the West.

The calendars are A4 size, open up to A3 for hanging, and display two images for each month. £10 each.

**Christmas Cards**

Two new designs, A6 glossy cards, £5 for a pack of 10 cards with envelopes. One old favourite, A5 glossy cards, £7 for a pack of 12 cards with envelopes. See website for choice of images.

**Ordering and Postage**

All products can be ordered through our website, or by post with a cheque. UK postage is £3 per order.

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**Anisa**

Anisa’s father killed her mother in front of her when she was 6 years old. Her father was sent to prison for 13 years, during which time Anisa and her sister were brought up in an orphanage. They don’t want to have any contact with their father now he’s been released; anyway, he is jobless and destitute. Life is tough for someone in Afghanistan forced to leave an orphanage and with no family to go to. An LNF scholarship offers the possibility that Anisa can support herself and her sister. She wants to study law and says “I know that being a lawyer is not an easy job but for me it is the best way to work with hopeless and wronged people of society to make my mother happy and rest peacefully. I have personally suffered injustice in my childhood, sometimes I am thinking about revenge but revenge is not good for humanity because still it hurts someone. The only way to get out of this injustice is social challenges and women’s education and improvement.”
**Medical Scholarships**

LNF currently provide scholarships for 68 medical students, 27 midwives, 10 nurses, and 52 studying for other degrees.

We are giving women an opportunity to manage their own lives rather than being married off to someone older and then living with his family. It’s a life limited by compound walls, leaving only when accompanied by a man and then often under a burqa.

Because of the pandemic, universities were closed for the first half of the year, though most continued with courses online. But many students haven’t a reliable internet connection, and some returned to their family home in the provinces. The situation became chaotic and difficult for us to manage.

Many students support themselves by working part-time but, during the pandemic, the work dried up and hardship followed. We gave all students a cash grant of £77 from LNF resources in July. This is additional to the annual £77 Eid gift paid for by LNF Trustees.

£154 will have made a huge difference. For some it will provide the first solid meal for a while. For others, it will pay for internet access, fast becoming as essential to students in Afghanistan as it is in UK.

The universities opened again in September. We received hundreds of applications for medical scholarships, interviewed 86 and selected 25. As before, the most difficult part of the whole process is knowing that for many of those not selected their chance of independence has been destroyed.
Maryam’s dad became paralysed when she was seven and her mother developed mental health problems. With her four brothers she was moved to an orphanage and, last year, graduated from school with very good grades, especially in science subjects. As she says “It is 13 years that I did not see my father and four sisters, they are living in Daikondi in poverty, deprivation and bad situation. I want to work hard to help them to build a better life”.

Jamila’s family live as refugees in Baluchistan in Pakistan. The family of eight are supported by her father who runs a small second-hand clothes shop. It’s difficult for refugees to attend universities in Pakistan so Jamila worked teaching English and science subjects in private schools until she had saved enough to return to Kabul, enrol at Kateb university and study medicine, which has long been her dream.

Marina and Rhila are sisters whose father died the year they left school, with good grades, in 2013. Since then, they and their other three sisters have woven carpets to sustain the family, earning around £50 a month between them. But they’re both determined to become doctors and with LNF scholarships, studying during the day and weaving carpets at night, they probably will. They deserve the chance.

This year Shariwar Khwahany, who received the first medical scholarship from LNF, completed her practical training, registered as a doctor and is now working in a hospital in her native province of Badakhshan.

She featured in an article in our 2014 newsletter when she reported that her father had just lost his job and, as he was unable to pay for her education, she was very close to being forced into an arranged marriage. An LNF scholarship changed that.
A Year’s Funding

December
- £4,570 to Serve Afghanistan for the preparation of Braille and audio aids allowing blind children to receive an education.
- £1,875 continuing support for seven girls at Heela Model School in Jalalabad.
- £4,050 to Rustam school in Bamyan province for water supply, printer and solar electric equipment.

January
- £3,916 for printing and distribution of traditional children’s story book.

February
- £9,930 paid for surgeries for women and children – see article P12.
- £8,280 to Scawno school. Last payment - see box below
- £8,760 bought a minibus for the Pink Shuttle women's transport project in Kabul.

March
- £6,830 for livelihood sewing classes and production of cloth bags to replace plastic bags.
- £7,650 funded a midwifery clinic in Pagman district.

April
- £2,088 allowed Afghan Children’s Circus to help people in refugee camps cope with the Covid pandemic.
- £6,215 assisted 80 needy families affected by Covid lockdown – see article P10.

July
- £13,565 - $200 to each and every student receiving an LNF scholarship as an Eid gift and to help them cope with the disruption caused by the pandemic. 50% paid for by LNF trustees.

September
- £3,750 for English language courses for 22 medical students.

October
- £9,586 allowed Healthprom to run a transport system in the remote Kaldar province of Balkh district taking women in labour to a health centre or hospital.

November
- We expect to pay around £110,000 this year directly to universities and colleges for 157 scholarship student fees.

SCAWNO
With regret we ceased funding a small school in Kabul this summer after 7 years. We concluded that we could no longer trust the management to truthfully account for their activities and accounts. No significant sums went astray but it’s your money we’re spending and, hard as it is to put those teachers out of a job and to deprive the kids of classes including judo and art, difficult decisions are sometimes needed.
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Gawharshad University Update

We have supported students at Gawharshad University since 2013, steadily increasing the number of scholarships until we now support 52. Most of the students are Hazara as the university was started by a Hazara, Dr Sima Sumar, Minister of State for Human Rights and International Relations. Hazaras are a Shiite ethnic group who have frequently been discriminated against in Afghanistan. The university has a women’s empowerment centre and offers lower fees to female students who can study a wide range of subjects, from law to computer science, business administration and economics to engineering.

Fatima, 21, is the daughter of a farmer from Daikondi province. She did well at school and became engaged to a cousin living in Germany on the understanding that he would pay for her to study at university. After her first term, he changed his mind and told her to return home to Daikondi. Committed to the idea of some independence for herself, she refused and broke off the engagement. But then her parents refused to allow her back into their home, so she’s alone in Kabul. A friend with a job is letting her stay in her house rent-free and an LNF scholarship will allow her to continue her computer science studies.
Ten Years On

As I sit at my desk writing, I remember this week 10 years ago when Linda had been kidnapped and was being kept hidden as US troops scoured the valley she was in. When more than 10 reporters were camped at the end of our drive with TV cameras trained on the house, when the phone didn’t stop ringing.

We remember visits from US staff from DAI, Linda’s employer, from the UK Ambassador to Afghanistan, from the Foreign Office. We were visited by a Snowy Owl, which seemed to be a good omen.

We remember that dreadful visit from the police at 3.30 in the morning to tell us Linda was dead. Phone calls from William Hague, who was Foreign Secretary, from the head of US military General Petraeus who, rather insensitively, advised us that the rescue attempt had been undertaken by the best troops in the world, one of whom, we subsequently found out, had unnecessarily tossed the grenade which killed Linda after all of the kidnappers were dead. We remember the long sleepless nights, torn, ragged, aching, crying.

We recall the tremendous support we received from our local community and from the police and from the government. Visits to London, to No 10, to the Foreign Office, listening to a presentation by the US Navy describing, we believe honestly, what happened during the rescue attempt. The funeral, the inquest. The constant media interest.

It’s a risk - when instantly catapulted from obscurity in Mangersta to a family every newspaper wants to interview, when what you say is picked over and interpreted - one can become even more self-important than normal. You just have to remind yourself you didn’t do anything special, rather things outwith your control happened to you.
We were absolutely determined not to become some of those terribly sad people who expose their sorrow, crying on the TV screen, thus giving a vicarious emotional hit to viewers... and who are then dropped because their story has been told.

Our remote location, friends with some experience of the media and the time after the initial kidnapping all gave us time to reflect on how to manage press contact and what Linda's legacy might be.

We set up the Foundation and there's no doubt this was by far the best thing we could have done at that time. We were busy and had started something which benefited not only others but ourselves.

At some point we met a guy whose back had been broken in his teens in a surfing accident and who was paralysed from the neck down. He'd started a charity developing wheelchairs for underdeveloped countries. He told us the accident was the best thing that had happened to him in his life. At the time we thought he was exaggerating vastly.

Now we're not so certain. Sometimes desperate things happen which require you to wake up to what you're doing with your life and you discover just how much freedom you actually do have and how much you can change things if you set your mind to it.

For us, the past 10 years have been incredibly rewarding. Of course we fervently wish Linda had lived. We can't say it was the best thing that happened to us but it definitely has delivered benefits.

When the worst thing that could happen to a family has happened and you realise how things work out afterwards is up to you...then there's not so much to get worried about.

*This and a follow on article in the Sunday Times is based on an LNF website blog marking the 10th anniversary of Linda’s death.*
We find it very difficult to assess the impact of the pandemic in Afghanistan. Officially you'd be 14 times as likely to have been infected than in the UK. But we don't believe this: three out of three of our staff and volunteers in Kabul went down with it.

More than 150,000 Afghans were forced to return home from Iran in March after Covid took hold. People who relied on daily wages to buy daily food, undernourished to begin with, couldn't afford to be locked down. Many Afghans find it difficult to access a health system so surely many cases and deaths have been unrecorded.

There is no doubt, however, that many suffered because of food shortages, price rises and lack of wages this spring so, when we were approached by the Gawharshad private school in Kabul to fund emergency distribution of supplies to poor families, we were keen to help.

The school had been closed and the staff weren't working. They offered to manage the whole thing at no cost if we would fund the supplies.
130 families were surveyed in an area where many live in hastily constructed houses without basic services on the steep slopes surrounding the city. 80 packages were distributed, each comprising 5 litres cooking oil, 50kg flour, 10kg rice, and 5kg of each of beans, pea/gram, split peas and lentils. One food parcel costs £73 and is expected to last 4-5 months.

Of the 492 individuals who benefited directly, 70-80% were women and children. It marked the end of a worrying time for so many families. A very happy day for them.

Bakhtawar’s husband was killed in a terrorist attack three years ago. She lives with her three daughters and two sons, aged 4 to 15 and cleans several families’ houses to put food on the table. But most families stopped her coming during the Covid outbreak so sometimes she was forced to go from door to door asking for 10 Afghanis (10p) to buy bread for her daughters and sons. She said that “most of the time during quarantine my children have to eat a loaf of bread with water”. Now, for a few months, that’s changed.

Ali Dad is 48, his wife is sick and they have six children. He goes to work every day as a guard at a government school but has not been paid for over 4 months. His wife and two daughters, aged 9 and 12, weave carpets and this meagre income is all they have. Your donations have helped to give this family relief from their situation for several months.
French Medical Institute for Mothers and Children

In 2020 we continued to fund operations for children and women at the French Medical Institute for mothers and children in Kabul where good surgical care is given to the underprivileged from rural provinces.

Selection includes consideration of surgical need, lack of availability locally and their economic situation. Accommodation and transport costs are covered so the kids can be accompanied by a parent.

This year we paid for three heart, eight orthopaedic, and two gynaecological operations. The total cost was £9,930.
Living in a war zone in Kapisa province, Gulalai’s family’s house, together with others in her village, was destroyed by a rocket. The family migrated to another area, looking for safety where her father works as a casual construction worker earning around £25 a month. It’s not enough to live on and he’s racked up debts over £1,000 and shopkeepers have stopped their credit. The school is far from their home and Gulalai couldn’t walk there because of the congenital bilateral developmental dislocation of her hips. Her surgery was successful and she will start school this year. The family finances will not be fixed so easily.

For many years Birar Bakht felt pain and suffered from severe bleeding. Diagnosed with cancer, she needed a hysterectomy. Successfully treated in September, as she says “I feel relieved now, it was strange for me after the recovery because my body had become so used to feeling pain. A part of me is gone now and it was a part that was killing me step by step. I am so grateful to those doctors who took care of me”.

In summer 2019, 4 year-old Gul Seka was playing outside with her five sisters when she fell down into the remains of a fire covered by mud and straw. Her hand was very badly burnt but, as they live in a remote mountainous area, her parents didn’t take her to hospital but tried to cure the wounds with plants. When this didn’t work they travelled to a health centre who referred her to the French Children’s hospital where there are both orthopaedic and plastic surgeons. The operation was successful and, thanks to your donations, she now has two working hands.
Nursing and Midwifery Scholarship programme

In 2019 we sponsored students at the rural Jaghoori Khatam college campus but security there deteriorated so much we found ourselves unable to monitor existing, or interview new, students. So, whilst we will continue to support those already selected, we have transferred the provincial midwifery programme to the Resalat Noor college in Bamiyan town.

Nursing has never been a popular career choice in Afghanistan, being considered a menial duty. But this is bound to change so we’ve started a new programme supporting six nursing students at Farabi College in Kabul.

So currently we support 11 midwifery students at Khatam in Kabul, four at Khatam in Ghazni city, five midwifery and two nurses at Jaghoori, six nurses at Farabi in Kabul, and seven midwifery and two nurses at Resalat Noor in Bamiyan.

Hanifa’s school exam results were good enough for a scholarship to study Geology but her parents wouldn’t allow her to go because of the fighting in the university city. She prepared at home for an entrance exam at another university but she didn’t get a scholarship and her parents couldn’t afford the fee. Her father is a sharecropper who keeps just 40% of the profit from the land he farms and can’t really support her studies but her sister had promised to sew handicrafts and pay for her accommodation expenses. She will study midwifery in Bamiyan.

Najiba, 23, lives with her three brothers and four sisters, her dad, aged 80, and her mum. Farming wheat and potatoes brings in £450 a year. One of her eyes was injured in an accident but there was no doctor close so she lost it. She did well at school but was unable to go to university. Now she wants to study nursing in Bamiyan and then work as a professional nurse in her village.
Fundraising

Despite disruptions due to restrictions associated with the pandemic, fundraising since this time last year has raised a whopping £21,238. A big thank you to all of you who have organised, taken part and contributed in any way:

Rob, Janis and Catherine at the Morven Gallery; John Porteous for Wallace Stone Christmas lunch savings; a Solstice Mandala weekend with Therese and Peter Muskus; Yoga with Rebecca Ellis and Will Medd; donations in lieu of presents on the marriage of Doctors Yama and Amy, and on Sir Stuart Etherington’s and Mr Pointy Haired Jedi’s birthdays; Linda and Jacqui’s 2.6km challenge; online yoga with Alessandra; and Hereford Quakers September Appeal.

An Open Water Swim Challenge in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the Foundation was the brainwave of trustee Elspeth Murphy. 83 swimmers rose to the challenge to swim 1,3,5 or 10km on a good day during September, many in the Outer Hebrides, others across Scotland, England and further afield in Guernsey, the French Alps and British Columbia. All will receive a unique embroidered badge donated by Norma Macleod of Immerse Hebrides. These amazing swimmers have raised over £1,285.

Our usual annual 10k in October became virtual with runners, walkers, cyclists taking part around the world, in Australia, Canada, USA, Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and across the UK, during the first ten days of October. Locally, on the 10th, a restricted number kept feet moving over 10 hours in a continuous relay around the 10k Bhaltos Peninsula. Amanda Berringer walked 10k, asking for donations to LNF on her 50th birthday; Jane Cumming and Jenny MacPherson walked every day for 10 days; and Jen Gow ran 10k every day for 10 days in Vancouver.

Their first get-together since lockdown, the Harris Guides walked 10k on the Isle of Harris, and 18 Leamington Brownies completed a combined 65km in 45 minutes.

DAI in Maryland, USA, Linda’s former employer, organised a virtual 5k, a virtual trivia night, and Zoom classes, including Albanian cooking and ‘laughing’ yoga.

The virtual 10k and associated events in October raised £14,035. Thank you all for your generosity and help.

If you would like to organise your own fundraiser, please let us know. You could even help from your armchair if you shop online by registering for “Easyfundraising”. It doesn’t cost you anything, you only need to set it up once and a small percentage of your purchases go towards LNF funds. To do this visit: https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk

And if you are thinking of a holiday in the Outer Hebrides, look no further than Timsgarry Byre. Profits from the weekly rent of this newly-renovated holiday cottage pay for all the administration costs, travel and other expenses for the Foundation. You will be able to enjoy a week of luxury in the knowledge that you are helping to make a real difference to the lives of the women and children whose stories feature in this newsletter. www.timsgarry-isleoflewis.co.uk
Thanks for all your support

If you would like to make a donation to help transform the lives of women and children in Afghanistan, please complete the form below 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: £ ................................... to the Linda Norgrove Foundation.

If you wish your donation to be treated as Gift Aid and boost your donation by 25p on every £1 you give, please tick the box and sign the declaration below:

☐ I want to Gift Aid this donation, future donations and any other donation over the past 4 years to The Linda Norgrove Foundation.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Please notify us if you change your name or home address, want to cancel this declaration, no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

Signed:................................................   Date: ...........................

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