Helping women and children in Afghanistan

www.lindanorgrovefoundation.org
Welcome to our eleventh annual newsletter

Not surprisingly this has been the worst year for LNF since our inception.

In the Spring everything was going so well. We had spent weeks building a robust system of student records, and moved to a twice-yearly intake of students as our scholarship programme expanded. Students graduating to become doctors.

Sophie, our part-time, young, bright staff member in Uig, was proving invaluable as our LNF workload increased.

Then US forces left Afghanistan and the Taliban took over. A country should be governed by its own people rather than by an occupying army but Afghanistan has swapped an occupying foreign army for a local occupying army.

Afghanistan had been spared a long and bloody civil war but we do hope that the moderate element which exists within the Taliban will prevail, not those who would terrorise the populace into submission.

We eventually managed to arrange the evacuation of our staff from Kabul and they are now safely installed in a comfortable house near to us here on the Isle of Lewis. Part-time staff have been taken on in Kabul to replace them to continue the vital work we are still doing in spite of the difficulties.

Our intention is to continue the programmes we have started. Many of our students have returned to universities to study, but hunger is the main challenge now, following a severe summer drought, the removal of western aid and the failure of the banking system.

After ten years of helping things to improve, it's hard to remain optimistic about the immediate future for Afghans. As their situation gets worse, women and children will need our help more. Difficult as it gets, we have to try harder to overcome the obstacles, always remembering that our troubles are piffling compared to theirs.

Thank you all for your ongoing support.  

John and  
Linda
Christmas Cards and Calendars

2021 Calendar
Our 2022 calendar contains a selection of beautiful photographs of Afghan life, landscapes, and children, with many of the pictures taken by Afghan photographers. The calendars are wire-bound, with each month displaying two pictures, opening up to A3 for hanging. £10 each.

Christmas Cards
We have two new designs of A6 glossy cards, sold in packs of 10 with envelopes. £5 per pack.

Ordering and Postage
All products can be ordered through our website, or by post with a cheque. UK postage is £4 per order.

Parwin Begom
Parwin received an LNF food parcel in November.

When interviewed, she was very calm, dignified but clearly dispirited by the situation her family now find themselves in.

They were displaced by the fighting months ago in Kapisa province and, after some time sleeping rough in one of the parks in Kabul, were fortunate when a relative found them an old-fashioned house to live in.

Parwan’s husband is disabled, unable to work. She has five children, the eldest a daughter who now can’t work, the next-elder a 12 year-old boy who sustains the family by collecting iron and selling it, earning 50p a day. They can’t afford to pay the bills for water, which is distributed by commercial tanker, or for electricity. Her LNF food parcel (see page 14) provides some relief, albeit a temporary one.
Evacuating our staff from Kabul

On 29th August our Afghan staff, Frishta and Farzana, along with Frishta’s husband Murtaza, their baby Kia and their young brother Zakar, had been at Kabul airport for two days and nights.

Amongst a crazed mob kept back by ‘our’ soldiers constantly shooting at crowd’s feet, they’d seen a man shot dead in front of them when he defiantly moved too far forward. They had suffered interminable hours on an overcrowded bus with a crying baby, with no seats and in temperatures in the high 30’s.

They were just a whisker off entering the airport twice, knocked back once because not all of the family were on the gate guard’s out-of-date evacuation list, another time when the gate closed because of a perceived bomb threat just when they got close to the front of the line to get inside.

It was in the middle of the night of the 29th. By an amazing set of coincidences involving phone calls across the globe, we had found someone who knew and could directly phone the US guard on the gate nearest to them. An emergency rescue had been planned, involving a small team of US soldiers coming out into ‘no-mans-land’ and escorting them inside. Negotiations with the Taliban had been completed. The airport was uneasily quiet in the hours before dawn, it was dangerous, but they were to be ready with no bags, waiting.

Then the WhatsApp messages started coming at 0330 from the guard ‘So sorry ma’am. There is a vbied (bomb) threat and we are going on a pause’, ‘I think your safest bet is just go home I think. The pause could be significant’, ‘Very sorry ma’am, wish we could have been successful’.

It was a low point for everyone. They went home, commenting on how they had learned to appreciate simple things like the comfort of their own home, a pillow, healthy food.

We had been on or checking WhatsApp for 46 hours, catching less than four hours sleep.

We were all dejected, tired, drained and needing our beds.

It was 10 days previously they had asked us to try to arrange for them to be evacuated. Farzana and Frishta Matin were doubly at risk because of their ethnicity, Hazara, and their work with us empowering women. They had received threats from Taliban informers that, because they were involved in awarding scholarships only to women and none to men, that they would be reported to the new regime. As the Taliban were searching house to house, they had burned all of their academic certificates and papers.

We contacted our MP, Angus Brendan MacNeil, and he took up their case on our behalf.

By a fortuitous coincidence, the next day we met a friend on the road in Uig: Torcuil Crichton, Westminster Editor for the Daily Record newspaper. He offered to help and the next morning had contacted major Westminster politicians.
But after a week of getting no response whatsoever from those managing the UK evacuation efforts, we decided we had to make more noise and get more attention for their plight. We issued a press release and appeared on both STV and BBC evening news, as well as various newspapers and we contacted as many influential people as we could think of. Shortly after Frishta, Farzana and family were placed on the UK evacuation list.

Another amazing coincidence occurred when our Stornoway accountant put us in contact with a very energetic Canadian visiting the Hebrides, whose grandparents were from Harris, who knew Linda from her time in Afghanistan, was well connected to US military and State Department folks and was actively involved in trying to arrange the evacuation of others from Kabul from her Stornoway hotel.

Through her connections, and through the efforts of DAI, Linda’s employer from Washington DC, we managed to have our party added to the US evacuation list, too.

Later that night, in a dim office, with the rain battering off the window, tapping away at the keyboard sending passport scans for evacuation lists, I was struck by the parallel with the film Casablanca, arranging the evacuation of good people at risk from a totalitarian regime sweeping the country. It felt like history in the making and this was just about the only light, pleasant feeling during the whole saga.

Two days after returning home from Kabul airport, on 31st August, Frishta received an unexpected phone call from a US charity, Afghanistan Uplift, telling them to travel by bus to the northern city of Mazar e Sharif where there were planes waiting.

After an eight hour bus trip they arrived, were billeted in a wedding hall and advised that there were more planes coming the following day. All was optimism. But the next day they were told that another eight busloads had to arrive before any flights went out.

Three weeks of delays followed, during which time they moved eight times, trying to avoid Taliban attention.

At times there were 12 people to a room, the baby had no room to move and had to be on his mum’s lap 24 hours a day. Husbands and wives were split up. Taliban soldiers came in, arrested people and took them away. Frishta’s husband was involved in two fights when he insisted on being reunited with his family. He was twice taken in for questioning by Taliban soldiers.
Frishta’s baby became ill with diarrhoea. He couldn’t stop crying, so Frishta spent some nights on the roof, freezing but without the hassle from roommates.

Eventually they made it onto a plane but even then the Taliban came on board before take-off to question people and check documents.

They only knew they were safe when they landed in Qatar. They were met and well looked after by UK FCDO staff for three and a half weeks of security and medical screening. Then to Edinburgh for 10 days quarantine.

Then to Stornoway arriving on 26th October, ten weeks after the Taliban takeover. It was a very happy meeting for us all.

Zahra

Her ‘house’ is a very small yard with a cold room. Her husband was badly injured in a factory and then disappeared so now she supports her mother and five children. The only boy, aged 17, has a mental problem and they can’t let him go out because he fights with everyone and can’t control himself. One girl is totally deaf. One girl has a cleft palate.

Zahra does some sewing and crochet to earn money, making 20p a day which buys two loaves of bread. She hasn’t enough money to send her children to school or to pay for any medical treatment. Her LNF food parcel is a godsend.
Facing Death by Murtaza Matin

We decided to get out of Afghanistan. The country we wanted to live in and make a bright future in was no longer ours and it was not possible for us to live there anymore. We were now in front of the gate of the Kabul airport hearing constant gunfire, where thousands of people were waiting to find a way to enter and to escape.

We also joined them. Five of us waiting in a wave of floating crowds in front of the gate. The only difference was that we were inside the minibus to get in. It was a very difficult moment. The air was heavy. The day before, in an explosion, hundreds of people who were hoping to build a new life in a safer country were killed. We were waiting nervously to find out if we would also meet death like them or we could escape. We had to leave the home that we built with love. Gone now. We just had the clothes we wore, and we left our home with powder and diapers for nine months old Kia. At that moment, our only wish was to escape death.

As I was thinking about all this, suddenly I saw everyone was running. They were shouting that another attack was about to happen. We were inside the minibus. We ran, too. For a moment we felt that we would meet death. I was looking at Kia and asking myself why he should suffer all these difficulties? Is this his last moment alive? Will we be alive to see him growing up in a peaceful environment? My mind was exploding with lots of other thoughts. It was very hard to be hopeful at that time. After an hour we came back to the gate but the Taliban were controlling the gate. We got to know that it was just a plan to occupy the gate.

Another day passed. The day when tears came from our eyes both for leaving the house and tear gas. The tears were doubled when I saw Kia was crying loudly because of tear gas. Eventually, our hopefulness changed to hopelessness when the last British flight left the Kabul airport. After hours of conversation with death the window was closed. But in the end, after a long wait, a new window opened, and now we are in Scotland.

Sakina

Her husband was one of the 95 killed when ISIS exploded a bomb at the Baqirul Olum Mosque three years ago. She has six daughters and one son. Three daughters are married and one son-in-law helps her and her remaining family.

Her only son is disabled, unable to walk and his legs have nearly wasted away now. One daughter is also disabled and walks with difficulty. There is no money to pay for any treatment, little for food so she’s grateful for the LNF food parcel.
Scholarship Update

Our sponsored students’ studies were disrupted many times during the first half of the year when the Covid epidemic closed the universities. Courses were run online but not all of our students had or could afford the hardware and internet connection.

The private universities and colleges that our students attend have remained open, with mixed classes running as before, albeit with a curtain down the middle of the lecture hall to separate the sexes. Government universities have closed and not reopened.

Of the 163 students studying in the summer, 16 have fled the country and seven have stopped for other reasons. 140 are keeping going: there’s no doubt that adversity makes people tenacious. For some inexplicable reason, the Taliban have closed all of the women’s dormitories, forcing the women into shared private flats and houses.

Many of our students were scraping by, earning by teaching and tutoring part-time. That work has disappeared and now food prices have doubled. To address the new situation, we are giving living allowances.
The private universities themselves are struggling. Many students are no longer able to afford the fees, foreign transfers from funders have been disrupted, some staff have fled the country. Some may close.

After the Taliban takeover we received a flood of desperate emails from students begging to be evacuated to the UK. When we heard that our government had promised to bring over a further 20,000 refugees, 5,000 a year, we developed a proposal for 20 of our brightest medical students and 5 of those who had recently qualified to come to the UK.

We contacted the five medical schools in Scotland and received a tremendous response, all agreeing to take some. The doctors can fit into an existing Scottish refugee doctor training programme in Scotland. We can feel proud the Scottish medical establishment has stepped up to the mark.

This isn’t what we set out to do, preferring our graduates to work in Afghanistan, but the situation has changed with some of the women doctors sent home and told not to return to work.

This would be a tremendous opportunity for these women, many of whom would return to their country if the political situation were to improve. The skills they developed in Scotland would be in demand, both to practise and to teach others.

We are hopeful our government will have the vision to support our proposal. Presently, we can only wait as the conditions and criteria for the refugee programme have yet to be announced.

So, despite all of these huge problems, most of our students are studying and we’re not giving up. We’re providing living allowances and intend to give new scholarships next year. These women really do need and value our support. We’re their glimmer of hope.
A Year’s Funding

This list is little changed from that included within our summer newsletter, which some may not have seen. Since August it has proved impossible for us to transfer funds to Afghanistan by bank transfer, tragically as the need for support has increased. Most of the projects we have funded are continuing, albeit many have to adapt to the requirements of the new government, as LNF is doing with our scholarship programme and the introduction of student living allowances.

December

£4,600 pays for the first year of a medical graduate’s three-year residency at the CURE hospital in Kabul.

£5,521 funds the winterisation of the beehives of the successful Chaharde Women’s beekeeping Coop.

£13,304 fees for 50 women’s scholarships at the Gawharshad University.

£40,515 fee payments to 6 universities and colleges for 86 medical, dentistry, midwifery and nursing scholarships.

£1,000, doubled by AfghanAid’s ‘Big Give’ fundraising initiative, supports farming families struggling due to droughts, floods and covid.

January

£4,415 allows Serve Afghanistan to continue their programme of Braille book production, allowing blind children to access local schools.

February

£2,392 pays for practical training for our medical students in the CURE hospital in Kabul.

March

£6,485 enabled Italian charity Nove Onlus to convert a minibus for wheelchair access, extending the capacity of the Pink Shuttle bus service.

£8,000 enables Aschiana, an Afghan charity, to equip, open and run a basic school for a year for 50 kids within a refugee camp in Kabul.

May

£6,990 allows Afghan charity AGFO to help 20 women from a disadvantaged area to start street trading businesses in their local neighbourhoods, normally the province of men.
£6,485 to French charity Afghanistan Libre to open and run a midwifery clinic in a marginal area outside Kabul.

£7,000 to UK charity Concern’s ‘Ration Challenge’ in which volunteers raised money by limiting their eating to a refugee camp daily allowance for a week. Our money doubled what they raised and funded the AWARE programme which helps women to start and run very small businesses in rural areas in the northern provinces.

£17,460 to the French Children’s Hospital in Kabul to carry out 15 surgeries for children, 17 treatments and surgeries for women from refugee camps, and to distribute 200 hygiene kits to families within the camps. See article P12-13

- **June**
  - £5,000 towards relief efforts organised by Serve Afghanistan to help families who fled their homes during intense fighting in Laghman province.
  - £4,924 allows two schools in Bamyan province to instal additional security to boundary walls and for a drinking water supply to one.
  - £5,054 enabled the Afghan Children’s Circus to stage their annual circus festival, subsequently restricted to Nangahar province and Kabul. Funds left over will assist in the development of a new programme acceptable to the new government.

- **July**
  - £10,004 paid for Eid gifts and contributions towards internet costs associated with online classes for our 163 scholarship students.

- **October**
  - £9,730 funded three residencies for female doctors training at the CURE hospital in Kabul. Each residency lasts for 3 years at a cost of £4,490pa. We fund two and part-fund one in conjunction with a US doctor.
  - £251 paid Shahida’s fees to study medicine for a semester in Kandahar.

- **November**
  - £2,200 a week, potentially £15,400 this year. In partnership with small Afghan charity AGFO, we started a programme of distribution of food and hygiene parcels to women heading families in IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps. See article on P14.

- **December**
  - £101,300 due to be paid to universities and colleges for 2021 scholarship fees when bank transfers restart.
  - £23,000 due to pay to our students a living allowance for the Autumn 2021 semester.
Medical Operations

This year marks 10 years since we started funding medical operations for mothers and children in Kabul. Surgeries are offered to the most vulnerable women and children from across all 34 Afghan provinces – with all transport, accommodation and medical costs covered. The surgeries have continued to take place throughout the political upheavals in the summer and the French Medical Institute for Mothers and Children has been granted permission for their female staff members to continue to work.

Directly funding medical operations has always been a way in which we can make sure your donations make a difference to those who need it most. This year we gave over £17,000 to cover the cost of life-changing surgeries and treatments for 17 girls and 18 women.

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**Basra**, a 15 year-old girl from Kabul, is one of eight children supported by her 50 year-old father, who earns a living as a daily labourer. She has had ongoing problems with her knees and at one point was told by doctors at a provincial hospital that her legs should be amputated. Following a consultation at the French Medical Institute for Mothers and Children, thanks to your donations, she received two successful operations and can now walk normally.

She says, “*I am feeling very happy in these days. I want to go to school, to continue my studying and I want to become a teacher in future*”.

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**Torepkay** is currently living in an IDP camp with 19 members of her family. Life is extremely hard for the 45 year-old mother – there is no fresh drinking water in the camp and no school for her children. Many members of her family are ill, including her husband who is unable to work. Because they were unable to pay off old debts, no-one was willing to help the family financially and she was unable to pay for any medical support.

Torepkay had suffered from fibroids and uterine bleeding for two years. She was struggling to walk or even stand up straight. The surgery funded by your donations at the French Medical Institute for Mothers and Children changed that.
When Omida was only one year old she accidentally drank a glass of bleach, injuring her oesophagus, making it virtually impossible to eat or drink. Her family is very poor, living in a remote area in the Balkh province, without running water or electricity, but despite their economic situation they did everything they could to get Omida the medical help she urgently needed. They borrowed £1,700 to cover the cost of initial treatment and travel to and from Kabul, but whilst they were away, to add misery to injury, a fire destroyed their home. They were then referred to the French Medical Institute, where Omida has had four surgeries to date. Omida is now two years-old and the surgeries have been successful. Although the family still face extreme financial hardships, they are overjoyed that Omida has been able to access this life-saving care, “We would have lost our daughter, because we had no money even for travel, and we couldn’t do anything. We are grateful to those who helped us save her”.

Welcome to our New Staff in Kabul

Negina - My father died when I was seven so I was raised by my mother and my uncles. Now I am the breadwinner for my mum and three sisters. I graduated from Gawharshad University with a degree in law and then studied at the Government law faculty in Kabul. I have worked for a variety of organisations and NGOs since, mostly concerned with supporting women at home and in their workplaces. For over the past two years, I have been a member of the Women’s Core Group for Peace, implemented by the Cordaid Organization. Our group had 34 members from 33 different provinces in Afghanistan, young female leaders working on conflict mediation and peacebuilding. I am delighted that my LNF wage allows me both to help Afghan women and children and to provide again for my family.

Norina - I wasn’t allowed to attend school until I was 14, but by studying two years at a time since then I managed to graduate from school with top marks and gain entrance to the energy engineering course at Kabul university. I was the only woman amongst over 300 men so it’s not possible for me to continue now. Both my mum and dad passed away last year and I am now breadwinner for my family of five brothers and sisters. I had no work so getting employment with LNF has changed my life. Last but not least, I wish that one day no individual might become deprived of the blessing of education and all the people will have the right to decide to get what they want.
Food for Desperate Housewives

It’s a particularly hard time for those women in Kabul who haven’t a man in their family. Although they could scrape by before, with a drought and the doubling of food prices, aid halted, tens of thousands of displaced people sleeping rough and winter coming on, their situation becomes ever more impossible.

It’s frustrating. The need increases daily but we have found it difficult to help because the banking system has all but collapsed.

But some person-to-person money transfer companies are still operating. So we have started transferring $3000 (£2,270) a week to Habiba who runs AGFO, a small Afghan charity we have worked with for a couple of years. She is extremely trustworthy and has great connections to local government in Kabul.

Every week, she undertakes surveys to locate women in charge of families displaced from their provincial homes to Kabul, or who have lost their husbands due to Covid, or who have children under 3 years old.

AGFO bulk buys provisions and makes up parcels of food, soap, and other essentials, which should last the family for more than a month.

Each week she distributes parcels to 50 families, each costing £45 and made up of 10kg rice, 5l oil, 7kg of both beans and flour, 5kg sugar, 2kg dried milk, 15 packs of spaghetti, together with soap, shampoo and sanitary pads.

Given the scale of the hunger in Afghanistan this winter, it’s a drop in the ocean, but oceans are made of drops and despite all the difficulties, we can still help.

Sonia’s story

Sonia’s house, whilst small and very distant from the city centre, is clean and well-tended. Her family of husband and four children fled their house in Parwan province during a Taliban attack and, after the inevitable time sleeping rough in the park, have managed to rent this house from a family who have fled to Iran.

Sonia was a baker in Parwan and has now started a small business baking bread for neighbours. Because of the lack of money she is often paid in small pieces of dough which she bakes for her family. Her eldest son works with a cart after school but doesn’t make much money yet.

Her husband? He’s a drug addict and instead of bringing things home for the family steals everything he can from the home to pay for his addiction. Hopefully she can guard the food in the LNF food parcel.
Fundraising

Once again supporters have come up trumps with a variety of fundraising events raising over £16,500 for LNF this year. Thank you to all of you for giving your time and energy to organising, participating in, and supporting these fundraisers.

We were delighted to be able to hold the main event of our annual 10k run and walk on the Bhaltos Peninsula again this year. On the same day, the Harris Guides walked 10k in atrocious weather on the Isle of Harris, raising £1,847. Lynne Goodacre and Helen Jones and friends raised £1,700 walking in North Tyneside and Lancashire respectively; others, too many to mention, ran, walked or cycled in different areas of the UK, in the USA, Canada, Kathmandu, Australia, France, Portugal, Sweden and Germany. In London, our webmasters, John and Annelise Conway, walked 10k with friends in Richmond Park, the longest walk John had done since his double lung transplant in February and his longest walk since LNF’s 2018 10k. A fantastic achievement, and recovery, John!

Overall, more than £7,000 was raised.

For the second year running we held an Open Water Swim Challenge with 132 people taking up the challenge, many in the waters of the Outer Hebrides, but also across the UK, in France and in Vancouver. 103 swam 1k, nineteen 3k, five 5k and three 10k, all of whom received a well-deserved unique embroidered badge to acknowledge their achievement. Adrian Clark and Kiltearn Swimmers, whose donations were matched by Rois Scottish Sea Glass, raised £1,120, bringing the overall amount to £2,850.

Christine Button, another intrepid swimmer, is taking part in the Frostbite Challenge over the winter months. If you would like to give her your support, here's the link: https://bit.ly/3Hccb6w.

Throughout the year, Andrew Gow has given a percentage of sales of Admiralty Sea Charts. You are not too late to buy one of these fascinating charts, link here: https://bit.ly/3wBGdfo.

The Harris Tweed Ride saw tweed-clad cyclists touring the streets of Glasgow in September. Jared Phillips ran in the Yorkshire Marathon, Alessandra Silvestrini offered online yoga classes, and Will Medd gave meditation classes in Lancaster. Emma Duff asked for donations to LNF on her birthday, and Cat Moore, Katja Riek and Nicola Poole, and Heather Afrin all sold prints of their artworks. Money raised has been donated by Monymusk Thrift Shop, members of Stornoway Bowling Club and Rotary Club, and many other organisations and groups.

Last, but not least, Friends of Tasmania continue to give their support with £1,334 raised this year.

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. https://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.

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Full Name: ..............................................................................................................................
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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: [ ]