Helping women and children in Afghanistan

www.lindanorgrovefoundation.org
Welcome to our summer 2022 newsletter

Surely by now we all realise that the situation in Afghanistan is not improving and is most likely not going to improve in the foreseeable future. But you could say the same about many countries, including our own.

In Afghanistan the situation has deteriorated further and faster, so many must wonder whether it’s a basket case and we’re throwing good money after bad.

But this kind of misses the point, doesn’t it? We didn’t set out to develop an economy or improve a government but to help individuals in need. That’s needed now more than ever.

Over eleven years since the Foundation started, despite some difficulties, we’re still going strong, providing more help to women and children in Afghanistan than ever before. We’re not giving up on women’s education - this spring we awarded another 36 women scholarships to study to become doctors.

The pace of change has speeded up. Fortunately, with a small and dedicated team, we have the ability to adapt faster. When levels of hunger increased, we started a programme of giving food parcels to families headed by women, 80 parcels a week for 5 months, reaching over 7,500 women and children. As people were literally freezing during the winter, we distributed 180 stoves and supplies of fuel to similar families.

The banking system is still not functioning and it’s nigh on impossible to transfer funds to an Afghan bank. We found an alternative, traditional Islamic, method of getting funds in called hawala and transferred £248,000 over 6 months, all collected in cash in Kabul. So far, we’ve been fortunate: not robbed, losing none. At the time of writing, our UK hawala dealer’s bank account has been frozen and they have stopped trading. But we are actively investigating several alternatives and will find a way.

In Afghanistan, our understanding is that Afghans are fearful, generally not supportive of the Taliban but, although violent robberies remain too common, security has improved and the roads are relatively safe. The wars, fairly constant since 1975, have pretty much stopped. Suicide and car bombing has declined although extremist elements continue to deliberately exacerbate ethnic tensions by targeting minorities. The economy is in tatters, few have jobs, prices have rocketed, and there’s no cushion if you’re near starvation.

At the end of the day though, it’s been your generous help throughout which has enabled us to keep going. Thank you.

John and Lorna
Children’s Coats and Shoes

Early in the New Year we were approached by a close relation of Habib Noori, the volunteer who managed the provincial women's beekeeping co-ops and school upgrading projects, enquiring whether we would fund her to buy and then distribute coats to children, in her home province.

In January, it is seriously cold in Chaharde Ghorband district, Parwan province, north of Kabul, so the kids were delighted, as you can see from these photos, with their new warm coats...for many their first new garment. £1,563 bought 229 winter coats.

The following month she distributed 228 pairs of shoes. It must have been great to exchange your flip flops for your first pair of new shoes, especially when there is snow lying and your folks don't have fuel for their stove when the temperature drops at night.

You could argue that the priority should be to feed the starving, but we're doing that. Our aim is to help women and children. Just look at those smiles!
Scholarship Update

The past couple of years have been difficult for our scholarship students. First they had to endure the Covid epidemic with the universities closed but offering tuition via online classes, then the disruption, and now uncertainties, following the Taliban takeover.

Some universities run classes for women in the morning and for men in the afternoon. Some have joint classes with a curtain between the sexes. Young women are fearful of being in the street and several have changed universities to reduce their journey time. Women's dormitories at universities have been closed and women renting rooms without male 'protectors' feel vulnerable, appealing to the police or Taliban being likely to bring even more danger.

It's not getting easier for female students but they have shown such courage to keep going and we're most certainly not going to fail them now. We're more determined than ever to continue to offer young women the chance of their own career whilst improving the future health of Afghan women.

So this spring we advertised our scholarships again, received over 500 applications, interviewed 74 and selected 36.

We need to be sure that selection is impartial, both to ethnicity and bribery so we take special care to ensure that the process is transparent and objective. Our Afghan selection committee of four comprises Frishta via zoom from Stornoway, a trusted volunteer from a charity we fund, a member of staff from the university and Negina, our factotum in Kabul. They come together just for this selection process and use standard questions and score sheets.
We have increased the number of scholarships offered to students who are part-way through their studies because many, previously managing with financial help from their families, found themselves unable to continue following the recent economic turmoil. It’s been incredibly difficult with banks limiting withdrawals of savings, government workers unpaid, withdrawal of aid and many losing their jobs.

The opportunity to earn an income through part-time work has disappeared and we now give all students a living allowance of £480pa. We distribute the same allowance to all as it proved impractical to ‘means test’ each student. To us, it’s not much when spread over a year but for them it’s the difference between managing or not.

The total number of scholarships now stands at 162: 96 medics, 4 nurses, 12 midwives, 3 dentists, 47 studying subjects as varied as computer science, law, and economics. We also sponsor three newly-qualified doctors though a three-year residency programme within the CURE hospital in Kabul.

Last year we had hoped to bring 20 of our brightest medics to study at the five Scottish medical schools, all of whom to their eternal credit had agreed to take students. Unfortunately, despite days wasted trying, we were unable to crack the layers of government defences which prevent Afghans from coming to UK.

We’ve given ourselves a bad headache from battering our head against this brick wall and have had to give up for now. A pity.

Student Stories

Shukria was three quarters of the way through her medical degree when the Taliban took over. Her father supported her studies but the government no longer pay his work pension. Two years ago, his house in their home province of Helmand was destroyed in fighting. She stills earns something working part-time in a hospital as a nursing assistant but it’s nothing like enough to pay for living and fees. The LNF scholarship will allow her to complete her studies.

Rohina has finished a year of medical studies. Her mother, a widow, worked as a cleaner to pay for Rohina’s studies but when the Taliban took over she lost her job. If she hadn’t been awarded a scholarship, she would have had to leave the university.
2022 Funding

January 2022

£4,000 to the online Afghan Children’s Songbook, making traditional Afghan children’s songs available free to teachers and families right across the country.

£3,500 was donated to Afghan Aid’s rural development projects via the ‘Big Give Christmas Challenge Campaign’ whereby every £1 donated was quadrupled.

£19,960 for our scholarship students living allowances for the autumn semester of 2021, to pay for their accommodation, food, transportation, and books. Essential now that the students have lost all opportunity of part-time work.

£62,050 delivered over 1,400 food and hygiene parcels to desperately poor families headed by women. See page 10.

£93,295 for 2021 university fee payments to 6 universities and colleges for 110 medical, dentistry, midwifery, and nursing scholarships. Payment, due last year, was held up by the failure of the banking system.

£9,188 pays the 2021 fees for 35 scholarships at Gawharshad University, for students studying Law, Economics, Business, and Computer Science.

£1,588 enabled Orphans Friends Charity Foundation to buy coats for 229 orphans and poor children in Parwan province. See Page 3.

£18,563 covered the cost of three rounds of the distribution of stoves and fuel by volunteers from Gawharshad High School to 180 vulnerable women who are the breadwinners for their families, both in Kabul and rural Bamyan province. See page 10.

£8,500 to the Scottish charity Glasgow Afghan United funding two rounds of food parcel distributions in January and April, to 240 families in the Kunduz and Baghlan Provinces, where the charity has good local contacts.

February

£795 enabled Orphans Friends Charity Foundation to distribute 228 pairs of shoes in Parwan province. See Page 3.

March

£5,982 continued our support to Serve Afghanistan who help visually-impaired students, allowing them to access mainstream primary to higher education by producing educational materials in Braille, MP3 and large print.
£9,900 funded the charity HealthProm, providing emergency transport for women in labour in the remote Kaldar region of Balkh province in the north of Afghanistan.

April
£6,100 provided **50 student scholarships at private Gawharshad High School**, covering the cost of fees, stationery, uniforms and books for primary-aged girls from poor backgrounds.

£3,300 provides funding for **Afghan charity LEFAO**. 20 children, who had been working on the street, were supported to start school and are receiving additional vocational training – plumbing and wiring for the boys and embroidery for the girls.

May
£14,481 to help launch a free **Telemedicine service for Afghans**. Upgrading the security and accessibility of their IT systems and funding three female doctors in Kabul, two gynaecologists and a paediatrician, to provide remote consultations to women and children.

June
£33,360. Another round of **scholarship students’ living allowances**. Two rounds every year.

£16,000 to **Afghan charity Aschiana** to run two schools in IDP camps in Kabul for those displaced from their homes.

£8,500 allowed the **Italian charity NoveOnlus** to run a mobile health clinic for a year. It provides free health care in deprived areas, the doctor sees around 55 patients a day. 75% are women and children.

July
£15,300 pays for **15 surgeries for children** and 12 for mothers at the French Children’s Hospital in Kabul.
Afghan Exiles

The Matin family

Following their harrowing and lengthy evacuation from Afghanistan, the Matin family, Frishta and Farzana who worked for LNF in Kabul, together with Frishta’s husband Murtaza Barlas, their baby Kia, and younger brother Zaker are all settled in an excellent house in Stornoway.

FARZANA NOW HAS A JOB WITH THE SCOTTISH REFUGEE COUNCIL IN GLASGOW, ZAKER IS TRAINING AS A CHEF, MURTAZA IS TAKING ENGLISH CLASSES. BOTH FRISHTA AND FARZANA CONTINUE TO WORK PART-TIME FOR LNF.

Athifa Ayoubi and her family

In February we heard from one of our medical students who was in hiding after organising women’s rights demonstrations in Kabul soon after the Taliban takeover. Hunted by the Taliban, with her husband and two young children she was moving between safe houses, scared and at her wits end.

It was a special case so we decided to try and get them to safety.

A Portuguese friend of a friend who had previously offered to help proved very effective, wrestling with the Portuguese bureaucracy and eventually facilitating Portuguese visas. A friend of hers donated the use of a house in the city of Porto.

Getting the family across the border into Pakistan proved difficult, a problem eventually solved by dollars. LNF trustees clubbed together and paid for the family’s air fares to Portugal.

Athifa hopes to continue her medical studies in Portugal.
Trustees, employees and volunteers

During Covid restrictions our Trustee meetings were mostly via zoom, so it was good for us all to get together again in April in Mangersta where Irwin McLean, our new trustee, joined us for the first time.

Irwin, a Dundee university professor now retired to Wester Ross, specialised in scientific research, discovering the genetic causes of several common skin conditions. A long-time supporter, he brings a wealth of experience, both in running projects and raising funds.

We are a small organisation, keeping our costs down and communications simple. The 'line up' is as follows:

John Norgrove fronts things, writes the newsletter, receives and processes applications for funding, arranges money transfers. Lorna Norgrove liaises with all of the donors, fundraisers, pays the bills, does the banking, organises the calendars and Christmas cards. Sophie Brown works two days a week in the office at John and Lorna’s house and does most of the admin work.

Carola Bell does the books, pays the employees, resolves all accounting issues, reclaims gift aid, etc.

These four, three women, three over 70, all working part-time, do the bulk of the work.

They are helped by:
Jane Cumming who manages the PR, including press releases, TV interviews etc.
Frishta and Farzana Matin, working from Stornoway, manage the scholarship programmes, liaising with students and universities in Afghanistan.
Negina Amiri very efficiently manages the Afghanistan end.
John Conway and Annelise Jespersen, volunteers based in London, continue to manage the website.

Many others are involved but this team keeps everything running.

Trustees are unpaid and cover their own expenses, volunteers receive no payments. Sophie, Frishta, Farzana and Negina all work part-time and are paid.

FOOD PARCEL STORY

Nazila lost her father and brother in war and lives with her mother in a room in her uncle’s house. Along muddy and old pathways, it's a dilapidated old house, very damp, without heating.

She was an instructor in a private school but lost her job when the Taliban captured Afghanistan.

“I had good enough grades in school to start university but I had to take care of my sick mother, and, without any supporter, I couldn’t go. Now I am in charge of family and have to provide for my mother’s medicines while we have no income”.

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Food Parcels & Stoves

Feeding large numbers of people hasn’t been our thing. Famine relief being so big it’s normally tackled by national governments, foreign aid budgets and the UN.

We have always tried to give specific help to identifiable individuals, changing their lives for the better and, hopefully, empowering them to help themselves. For our donors, positive stories offer the chance of a better tomorrow.

Our attitude changed last autumn. Aid had been suspended, many NGOs had fled the country, banks were restricting withdrawals, government employees were not being paid, a huge number of jobs disappeared overnight, food prices shot up. Some families found themselves sleeping rough or in temporary shanties in Kabul, displaced by heavy fighting in their home provinces.

Governments and the like weren’t coping and we felt we had to do something.

We tasked an effective and honest local partner, Afghan Green Future Organisation (AGFO), to give 50 families a week food and hygiene parcels comprising six weeks’ supply of oil, beans, flour, sugar, dried milk, pasta and simple hygiene kits.

The families who received the parcels were all headed by women who, as the Taliban restricted women’s abilities to work and move around unhindered, were finding it particularly difficult to cope.
As 2022 began the economic and humanitarian crisis got even worse so we scaled up from 50 parcels a week to 80.

We kept this up until the end of April, costing more than £60,000, supporting 1,400 families, maybe 7,500 people.

But families weren’t just starving, they were literally freezing.

We tasked another partner, Gawharshad High School staff volunteers, with finding a way to enable households in poverty, headed by women, to heat their rooms.

110 families in Kabul and 70 in the cold, mountainous Bamyan province each received a stove, seven large sacks of hardwood, kindling, and two large blankets to help them cope with the freezing temperatures. The cost was around £100 a family.

During difficult times, with committed partner organisations, local knowledge, and volunteers on the ground, using your donations, we’ve been able to help some of the poorest families get through the winter.
Aschiana Schools

Last year we funded the running costs of a school for children living in camps for Internally Displaced People (IDP), mostly those who had fled their houses following heavy fighting. There are no state schools for these children to attend and Aschiana, an established Afghan charity who have specialised in supporting street children, has built and run several schools in these IDP camps. The project was a success and this year we’re funding two schools.

£8,000 covers all costs of running a school for a year. 30 girls attend in the morning, 30 boys in the afternoon. It’s the only time they spend inside a proper building and they each receive a nourishing lunch, for many their main meal.

£133 doesn’t seem much to provide a child from a refugee camp with education for a year and a daily meal. They’ll learn to read and write and, for the occasional one, a chance to shine.

FOOD PARCEL STORY

Omulbanin is in her early 20s and mother to two small children. Her husband tries to support the family by shifting goods in the market in a wheelbarrow but earns less than 50p a day, which is not enough to sustain a family of four.

To try and bring in additional income Omulbanin sews clothes and cleans. Previously she had been reliant on her brother to support them but he recently lost his job.

The rental on their house is £20 every month and often they cannot make the payment on time. It is a struggle to feed her children and provide for them. The AGFO parcel is a temporary but much-needed respite from the worry of how to feed her family.

An LNF food parcel provided a few weeks’ respite.
We've supported this cooperative of women beekeepers in Chaharde Ghorband for several years, buying hives and a van, funding driving instruction and, last year, providing insulation materials to protect the hives from the freezing winter in the mountains. This was a success as only 7% of the hives died last year, which we understand is pretty good.

Overall, they’re doing well. Last year, over 330 hives produced over a third of a tonne of honey, 40kg kept for their own consumption and the rest sold or kept for stock.

Some women have got married but new members have joined. They had reserve funds but, when the banks and economy collapsed, they distributed 80% to help get themselves through the winter.

But the business is still going strong, they have 331 hives, $1000 cash, 210kg honey stock and a van, so this project should provide income and sustenance for years to come.

Zakia takes care of not only her mother, her sick father in-law, her nine year old daughter, but also her disabled husband. He has diabetes and in a series of four surgeries, lost fingers, toes and now a leg.

As she said "We have not seen anything good in our life since my husband lost his legs and job. On the other hand, I am thankful for my relatives and my neighbours, who have been helping me take my crippled husband to the doctor."
LNF Finances

The accounts for 2021 are currently with the accountant, but there shouldn’t be significant change from those prepared by our treasurer and trustee, Carola Bell.

Total income was £376k (2020 - £284k), total expenditure was £273k (£183k).

The funds held of £509k were exceptionally high at the year end because we had been unable to make bank transfers to Afghanistan after the banking system collapsed in August. We managed to get money moving again through the hawala system at the start of this year and were able to transfer a backlog, including last year’s university fees, of £101k.

So, effectively our year end reserves were £405k. We need to hold back around a year’s turnover (£350k) so we always have sufficient to pay the fees and living costs of our scholarship students until they graduate.

It’s important that we can continue to say ‘that every penny donated to LNF gets to Afghanistan’ because it’s an important factor in many donors’ minds. Trustees are volunteers and either don’t charge expenses, or charge them and then donate them back with gift aid. Administrative expenses have risen sharply now that we have three part-time staff, Sophie, Frishta and Farzana, but the Trustees dug deeper into their pockets to cover the increase.

FOOD PARCEL STORY

The food parcel survey team found Fatima and her three children living in desperately poor surroundings in a small dark room without lights. She pays £15 rent a month and is in debt to neighbouring shopkeepers and the local pharmacy.

Fatima’s husband died of a heart attack and she washes clothes and cleans her neighbours houses but can’t go far from home because she has young children.

Fatima pointed out that “some girls who are the same age as me are not even married but I, as a widow, have to support and feed my three innocent children for the rest of my life.”
Fundraising

Since our last newsletter, supporters have raised almost £11,500 for LNF through a variety of fundraising activities. Thank you to all of you for the time you have given organising, participating in, and supporting these fundraisers.

Lizzie Rose and members of the Craignish Village Hall Committee, Ardhern, Argyll organised an event and auction in November 2021 raising £3,384 with support from the Righ Foundation.

Intrepid Christina Button signed up for the Frostbite Swim Challenge committing to 12 swims during the four coldest months of the year in lochs, rivers and the sea in the UK, raising £369.

A Treasure Hunt for youngsters run by Claire Reekie, Monimail Church, Letham, Fife, split funds raised, sending £125 to LNF.

£2,000 was raised at the Charlbury Beer Festival specifically to provide food parcels for poor families in Afghanistan.

Puppies! Born to Cannach, cleaned up after by Kirsty and Angus McKellar who donated sales to LNF adding £5,600 to funds.

This year we have received funding from several trusts – some wish to remain anonymous but all, including these three:

The Angus Lawson Memorial Trust,
Alex and William de Winton Trust
The Inchyre Trust
have donated generously and we thank them all for this funding and for showing their confidence in LNF.

Funds have also been received from various groups and organisations:

The Monymusk Hall Committee, Cults Parish Church, Monifieth Probus Club, Eastwood Probus Club, Glasgow Lewis and Harris Association and The East Kilbride Stitching Circle.

And donations have been given in memory of Jane Hawkey, Christopher Homfray, Elizabeth Ann Linley and Sandy MacDonald.

If Sea Charts are your thing, you may find one of your favourite coastline for sale, thanks to Andrew Gow, link here: https://bit.ly/3wBGdfo

Our Open Water Swim Challenge is back due to popular demand. Swim 1,3,5 or 10K on a good day in July or August, anywhere in the world, and receive a unique embroidered badge detailing your distance. For full details and to register see our website: https://lindanorgrovefoundation.org/get-involved/events/

The twelfth LNF 10K run/walk is planned for Saturday 1st October. The main event will be on the Bhaltos Peninsula on the Isle of Lewis but you can take part wherever you are in the world. Details on our website in due course.

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 recently 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:  ☐

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2023 Calendar
Our 2023 calendar is a beautiful collection of photographs of Afghan life, landscapes and children, many 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.