



# BARAKAT

HELPING COMMUNITIES SHAPE THEIR OWN FUTURE

Newsletter

Issue No. 7 - Winter 2008

## Literacy Programs in Afghanistan

Barakat has always put a special emphasis on girls' education because of the many social, health, and economic benefits that come about when girls and women are educated.

In Afghanistan, Barakat has been working to address the large educational disparity between boys and girls through several innovative strategies including making separate classrooms for boys and girls, finding respected community leaders to advocate for girls' education, and starting literacy programs for girls and women who are unable to attend school.

Literacy, page 3

## Partner Highlight - Betsy Elizabeth Trust



From the moment they are born, children of the Dalit (or Untouchable) caste in India have little chance of a bright future. Shunned by most other local people, they have little or no access to things most Americans and many Indians take for granted—clean water, a roof that keeps the inside of their house dry, and the opportunity to receive a primary education. About 30% of Dalit children die before they reach five years

Partner, page 3

## Kids Receive First Ever Physical Examinations

According to experts, children between the ages of 3 and 17 should have routine physical examinations at least once every two years, meaning that by the time a child is 11 she should have been examined by a doctor at least five times since age three. At Barakat's schools in Afghanistan a large majority of the primary school students had never been



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## Barakat School Updates

### Pakistan

The schools in Pakistan continue to flourish under the leadership of Ms. Sumera Sahar, the country director for Barakat Pakistan. All three schools run both morning and evening shifts to encourage maximum participation of girls. Many girls' parents prefer to send them to evening classes, which are only offered to girls and taught by female teachers.

Barakat Pakistan is now in the process of opening libraries in all three schools, providing a ready resource to augment their in-school textbook learning. We struggle with

the issue of providing adequate space for the libraries in each of the schools, but we are improvising existing space and converting some of the schools' storerooms into child-friendly reading spaces.

### Afghanistan

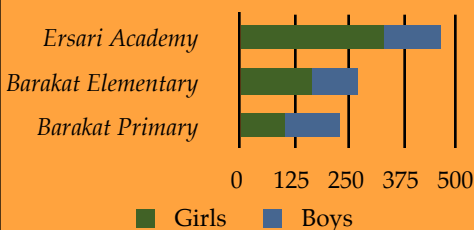
Under the direction of the Barakat Afghanistan staff, the schools have launched an anti-smoking campaign, directed at female students and their families. Smoking among women, who are restricted within the four walls of their houses, has become endemic in Afghanistan. Barakat staff is addressing the problem by reaching out to the families of the children to include them in the discussion about the ills of smoking.

### India

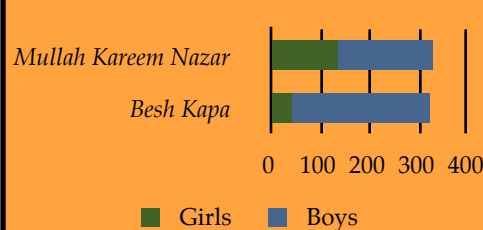
The *Women's Empowerment Program* at the *Care & Fair Barakat School* currently has 40 students who come in to learn not just basic literacy and numeracy skills, but also to be trained in potential income-generation skills like sewing, embroidery, carpet knotting and tufting. Their education is augmented with lessons on basic hygiene and sanitation, and methods of birth control.

Construction of the *Barakat Qazipur School* continues and we believe that our students, who are now studying in a warehouse, will be able to attend classes in their new school building during the 2008-09 academic session. Students, teachers, and families are eagerly awaiting this move in the upcoming months.

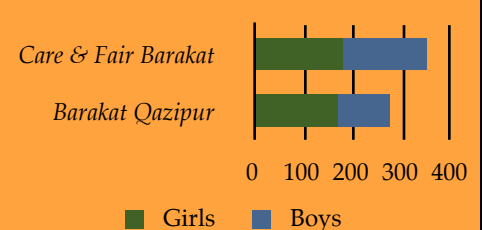
### '07-'08 Pakistan School Attendance



### '07-'08 Afghanistan School Attendance



### '07-'08 India School Attendance



## FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Greetings. My name is Damon Luloff. I began working for Barakat as executive director in September. I am happy to have become a part of the Barakat family. Since starting at Barakat I have met dozens of people who have told me first-hand of the importance of the work that Barakat is doing.*

*Now that I have been here for a few months, I have gotten a glimpse of that work, and I agree. Barakat supports seven schools, 22 literacy programs for girls, and several other educational and environmental programs. In these various programs, nearly 3,000 people—half of them girls—are gaining knowledge and skills that they will be able to use to have more control over their lives. Without Barakat's support, these 3,000 people would, most likely, have nowhere else to go for education. Hundreds of children would be working at home, in a shop, or on the streets. Hundreds of young women would have no chance at becoming literate.*

*This last fact is particularly important. Research has shown that education of girls and women is one of the most effective ways to improve the well-being of a society. Women are more confident when armed with information. They are able to make family planning decisions, reducing the number of children per household. They are better able to take care of their children, resulting in lower child mortality rates. They are more likely to send their children to school. They understand their bodies, and are less likely to die during childbirth. They are more valuable and productive workers, bringing in more income for their families.*



*Barakat's schools and literacy programs make special efforts to bring educational opportunities to girls and women in these communities. As executive director, I hope to help Barakat bring even more opportunities to girls and women in these areas.*

*In coming months, I hope to be in close touch with all the people who have supported Barakat in the past, who believe in our mission, and who are interested in becoming involved with Barakat or learning more about us and our programs. I look forward to meeting you and working together to provide quality education and a healthy environment for the people we serve.*

Damon Luloff

## Children Receive First Ever Physical Examinations

(Examinations from Page 1)

examined by a nurse or a doctor until a few months ago. Since the opening of Barakat's first school in Afghanistan in 2002, founders Chris Walter and Habibullah Karimi had wanted to incorporate a health component



A local doctor completes a physical examination of a student in Aqcha.

into the schools there. They were aware of the level of neglect of children's health in the schools and wanted to help the community address the problem. Unfortunately, they were not able to start such a program until recently because of two major obstacles.

First, certain Afghan government regulations have hindered them from getting authorization to spend any money on health services for the children in the schools. Second, physical examination of girls is highly controversial in these communities. The local Barakat staff spent a long time trying to convince community elders of the importance of physical examinations for both boys and girls. Once convinced, the elders gave permission for Barakat to go ahead with the health program.

The first examinations finally took place in June of 2007. All 646 students in Barakat's two schools were examined by a local doctor, many for the first time ever. Because of poor living conditions and neglected symptoms, many health problems were found among the children. The health problems included:

- A high incidence of kidney stones (highly unusual for children)
- Skin diseases and infections
- Partial crippling

Several children were found to have conditions that could not be treated with the facilities available in their towns. Barakat paid

for them to be sent to Kabul for treatment. The children with kidney stones had them pulverized by ultrasound.

Barakat hopes to be able to continue this program into the future. By receiving regular examinations, children in Barakat's schools will be able to receive treatment for potential health problems before they become serious and require expensive treatments that cannot be found in their town. This will keep the children healthier, enabling them to focus better in school. It will also reduce the number of expensive medical procedures children have to undergo, saving their families money.

## Girls' Scholarship Program in Afghanistan

This year Barakat is working to start a girls' scholarship program to further encourage girls to pursue secondary education. The program is aimed at exceptional female students who have completed the 7th grade and are interested in moving on with their studies. The scholarships are necessary because Barakat's schools only offer classes up to 7th grade. To move up to 8th grade, girls must attend high schools. Unlike Barakat schools, government high schools are not free of charge. They cost about \$650 per year to attend, which is prohibitively expensive for most girls' families.

The scholarship program, called Arzoo-e-Dokhtarha (Young Women's Aspiration), has been in the works for several months. In the spring of 2007, Barakat picked out exceptional girls to give scholarships. If all goes according to plan, these girls will be continuing their studies at high school in April of this year.



## Farewell from Sussy

It is hard to believe it has been seven years since I stepped into the world of Barakat. My experiences and my life views have dramatically changed with the connections and new friends I have accumulated, each becoming a special bead in my chain of accomplishments. I plan on using these encounters to expand the global view to children I teach in environmental classes, to my jewelry students who use materials from around the world, and to my neighbors in my New Hampshire town, inviting cultural exposure. Don't worry. I am not quitting, simply changing the method of my soapbox. Love to all!





The Jorgensens, owners of The Magic Carpet, are avid supporters of Barakat.



Dalit children in a performance at the Little Lilies Creche in Kodaikanal, India.



Turkmen and Uzbek girls and women in literacy class at a neighbor's home.

## Betsy Elizabeth Trust

(Partner from Page 1)

old, almost three times the average of 11% in all of India. Ann Peck, director of the Betsy Elizabeth Trust, has been working for years to address this problem. Ann directs four creche (pre-schools for Dalit children) near Kodaikanal in South India. She views the creche as more than just pre-schools. For her, they are centers through which she can build community trust and begin addressing multiple community needs that affect Dalit children's health and well-being.

In addition to providing young children with developmentally appropriate educational activities, the creche have enabled Ann to bring nurses into the community to give children physical examinations and make visits to the children's houses to help identify specific, affordable changes that can be made in their living environment to make it healthier. Through the creche she has also been able to provide nutritious meals to both the children who attend the creche and their older siblings, who her staff discovered are severely malnourished when school is not in session.

Over time, the local Dalit people are coming to see these creche as trustworthy institutions that are truly a part of their community. The trust Ann and her staff are building leads to more open communication, which enables them to learn from people how the creche can address more community concerns in the future.

Since 2003, Barakat has supported several creche through the Betsy Elizabeth Trust. In 2008, Barakat is supporting the Helping Hearts Creche and the Little Lilies Creche, which together serve 100 Dalit children.



## Carpet Gallery Highlight: The Magic Carpet

If you ever have the fortune to meet Paul and Eileen Jorgensen, it will not take you long to notice their love of spreading knowledge of fine vegetable-dyed carpets and their commitment to the people who make them.

Paul and Eileen's journey of discovery into the mysteries of rugs began with a trip to India, where they were deeply impressed with the tradition and beauty of Oriental rugs.

Because The Jorgensens believe that one's appreciation for rugs can be greatly enhanced through the study and understanding of the rich tradition behind them, The Magic Carpet offers two lectures and exhibits a year, featuring different aspects of the rug-weaving world.

When they first learned about Barakat from Chris Walter, the founder of Yayla and Barakat, they had already been importing rugs from DOBAG—the first

women's rug weaving cooperative in the Islamic world. Upon learning that Barakat's projects provide services that benefit rug weavers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India,

they were excited to support Barakat. Paul and Eileen believe that through supporting sustainable development projects for rug weaving communities, the world will continue to enjoy these ancient arts while supporting these talented artisans.

## Literacy Programs

(Literacy from Page 1)

Barakat Afghanistan's 22 literacy programs in the Faryab and Jowzjan provinces of northwestern Afghanistan continue to provide young girls and women with avenues towards literacy. Without such programs these girls and women would not have the opportunity to become literate.



The literacy programs are comprised of three semesters. In the past, once girls finished the third semester they were

expected to continue their studies at regular schools. However, the directors of Barakat Afghanistan found that the families of these girls were not allowing the graduates of the literacy programs to continue their studies at school. Many families had sent their daughters to the literacy programs because of the belief that girls should not be schooled with boys after they reach puberty. After the girls' graduation, many of their families remained reluctant to send them to school. This situation has created a demand for higher-level home-based literacy courses for girls and women who have graduated from Barakat Afghanistan's literacy courses.

Vital Literacy is Barakat's response to this need. The program, which began operating in September of 2007, is already providing free higher-level literacy instruction to 185 girls and women who have graduated from Barakat's literacy programs. Barakat's staff expects that even more girls and women will enroll in the program in the coming months.



*A young Indian girl learning simple words like “fruit” and “house” in Hindi.*

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**Barakat**  
283 Broadway  
Cambridge, MA 02130