

the promise

News about our Covenant With the Poor

Afghanaid

ILLITERATE GIRLS PEER GROUP

Literacy, health, rights and vocational training

Afghanaid works in one of the poorest countries in the world, which after three decades of conflict is only slowly emerging from a legacy of destruction. It is in the countryside where most hardship is suffered, and Afghanaid focuses its work in particular on the most vulnerable groups, notably women and children who suffered so much under the brutal Taliban regime. The next appeals of our Covenant With the Poor aim to raise around £9,000 to help fund for a year an Illiterate Girls' Group in the remote, mountainous and impoverished region of Badakhshan. *Melanie Brown* describes the project.

Illiterate young girls are one of the most vulnerable and most neglected groups in Afghan rural society. They are at a high risk of forced marriage and because they are unable to read or write, they find themselves on the lowest socio-economic rungs and excluded from society.

This year I met Asima (pictured below), who at the age of 14 was engaged against her will to a man over 30. She is now 16 and still in education thanks to our Peer Group which taught her about her



Asima and her teacher

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Afghanistan is rarely out of the news these days, and it is seldom good news. For a country so long at the centre of wider ideological struggles and political ambitions it is easy for us to forget the people at the centre of the storm.

And when we do think of them, it is hard to know how to help them.

So our next appeals, supporting Afghanaid to run a group for illiterate girls, provides us with the opportunity to make a different kind of contribution to the Afghan people's future.

Afghanaid has worked alongside Afghan communities for over two decades. They currently work directly with over 500,000 adults and children focusing on long term sustainable development in rural areas.

Thank you, in advance, for your generous support.

rights. Her teacher (also pictured) went with Asima to talk to her family to explain the dangers and difficulties of early marriage. The family listened and now Asima is looking forward to a much brighter future.

Asima is fortunate. Children in Afghanistan suffer much hardship. The rights of children are not understood by many people, and few have a chance to enjoy what we would describe as a fulfilled childhood. Because of high poverty levels children are expected to work to contribute to their family's income from an early age, often in very hard circumstances.

In addition, around 50 per cent of girls will be married to men, sometimes twice their age, by the age of 16. Marriage at such a young age greatly increases their risk of dying from childbirth. In Afghanistan a woman dies of childbirth every 28 minutes, and in Badakhshan, more women die of childbirth than anywhere else in the world. Badakhshan is a very difficult place to live due to its harsh terrain, lack of medical facilities and restrictive culture.

Like children, women are excluded from many



One in five Afghan children will die before their fifth birthday

Afghanaid

areas of society often because they are uneducated, lack skills, and do not understand their rights, and while steps have been made to improve their situation, much remains to be done. At Afghanaid's Women's Resource Centres women learn basic health messages that they then pass on to others so helping to save countless lives.

Afghanaid has set up a new group for some 30 young illiterate girls in Badakhshan. In addition to the established child rights syllabus which is aimed at developing girls' awareness of the fundamental needs of children, and strengthening their aptitude and natural ability to respond effectively to these needs in practical ways, the

new group will introduce a literacy and vocational training component from our Women's Resource Centres. This means that when they have completed their course they will have the skills and resources to set up their own small business.

Providing young girls with confidence and knowledge of their rights, and encouraging them to participate in community life, are crucial for the future of



A literacy and rights group for young Afghan girls



Afghanaid

a just and prosperous Afghanistan. Combining this knowledge with vocational skills allows the girls to leave the peer group both with knowledge of rights issues and practical skills such as reading and tailoring. These skills that will greatly enhance their status and role in their community and offer them increased potential for financial independence. In addition, health lessons offer

information and advice that can literally save lives.

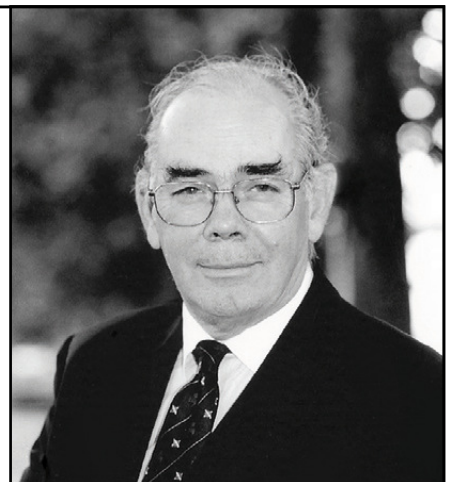
There is a great need to ensure young girls - who have been shaped more by war than peace - are equipped with the tools to allow them to take part in the future reconstruction and development of their country."

CWP

A full year's curriculum in Afghanaid's new Illiterate Girls' Peer Group costs £10,818. This includes equipment for the girls to start their own businesses once they have graduated at the end of the year. So far £2,754 has been raised from one UK Trust. Through our Covenant With the Poor appeals we hope to be able to raise the remaining amount for this project, namely some £9,000 (depending on the exchange rate).

DES LE GRYS

This issue of the Promise would not be complete without paying tribute to the huge contribution Des made to our Covenant With the Poor. He was our treasurer from 2001 and a key member of the team for many years. He produced a set of parameters which each project proposal had to pass before being chosen for the CWP appeals, providing accountability for the parish and the assurance that the money given so generously went directly to the causes it for which was intended. Your money was safe in his hands. We remember his kindness, integrity, resolve and sense of humour, and his commitment to the Covenant With the Poor.





emmaus
Hampshire

EMMAUS UPDATE

Christmas is the season when the plight of the homeless gains the most visibility, so this update on Emmaus Hampshire's Green Roof Project (by Trustee, *Mike Matthews*) is timely. Last year you gave £11,000 so that members of the Emmaus Community in Winchester can buy a van to help turn their lives around.

“Last March we started building Hampshire's first Emmaus Community on a site leased from Hampshire County Council at Bar End, Winchester, adjacent to the Household Waste Recycling Centre and the St Catherine's Park and Ride. Ten months on and construction is nearing completion (see picture), our builders are due to hand over the keys in January and we hope to open our doors for business in April.

So what is the 'business' of an Emmaus Community? Nearly sixty years ago Abbé Pierre started the Emmaus Movement in Paris. His simple concept was to create 'live/work' Communities in which formerly homeless people could live in a safe and supportive environment which also offered them meaningful work on the premises. This gave the Companions (as they are known) the time and space to recover from the despair of homelessness and the opportunity to make real and lasting changes to their lives and the lives of others. Today there are over 400 Emmaus Communities sited in over 40 countries worldwide. Although the concept only crossed the Channel in 1992, the UK, with 17 Communities now open and 10 more in the pipeline, is second only to France in numbers.

Nobody chooses to be homeless; it just happens and is usually the result of a relationship breakdown. Too many people hold the view that street beggars and rough sleepers have only themselves to blame and should do more to help themselves. But that is easier said than done: the characteristics of homelessness are far more complex. At Emmaus Hampshire, as well as providing a safe place to live and work, we will offer support, training and personal



development at the pace each Companion can cope with as they put their lives back on track and prepare themselves for a return to more normal living.

Recently two colleagues and I visited Emmaus Brighton & Hove, a mature Community with 40 Companions. We were most struck by the rapport they had built up with the people living locally. Their two shops thrive on return visits and their all day breakfast in the café provides the best value for money in the area. It all radiated the feel of embracing the homeless, not shunning them. We will strive to ensure that Emmaus Hampshire develops a similar style.

The work side of the Community will rely on donations of good quality merchandise for refurbishment (if necessary) and resale in the retail area. The initial range of goods is currently being determined and the intention is to start accepting donations in January. It will take about three years to turn this into a profitable enterprise and thereby make the Community financially self-sustaining.

Fundraising is not easy in the present climate. Emmaus Hampshire has raised enough to complete the build but still needs another £350,000 to cover the start-up costs before breaking even. To this end we are inviting supporters to become 'Friends' of Emmaus Hampshire by making regular donations during the crucial first three years of operation. For further details ring Avril Robinson, our Project Director, on 01962 828817; or visit our website at:

www.emmaushampshire.org.uk

Office address: 33 Staple Gardens,
Winchester SO23 8SR”