

## The British and Foreign Schools Society

### Project Update Report - 2011

#### Community Education Centres, Kabul

#### Project Aims and Background

The Community Education project began in 2009 with the opening of three Community Education Centres in areas of significant deprivation in Kabul. Based on the success and impact of those centres, a fourth centre was opened at the start of 2010. We then opened our fifth centre, in the Khuja Boghra area of Kabul, this February.

The centres are run to provide an education for isolated women and children living in deprived communities who would otherwise be left behind. In particular, the project aims to; 1) help 'out-of-school' children enter the State-run education system, 2) support those currently in a school to continue with their education, 3) improve the skills, confidence and knowledge-base of mothers and women, and 4) raise the perceived value of education, and particularly female education, amongst men and the wider community.

Based on the popularity and attendance rates at the centres in 2009 and 2010, our expectation at the start of 2011 was for the five centres to provide the following:

- 'Accelerated Learning Classes' for 300 children.
- Homework Support Classes for 550 children.
- Adult Literacy Classes for 160 women.
- Tailoring Classes for 400 women.
- Basic Health Education meetings for 300 parents.

#### Outputs Summary

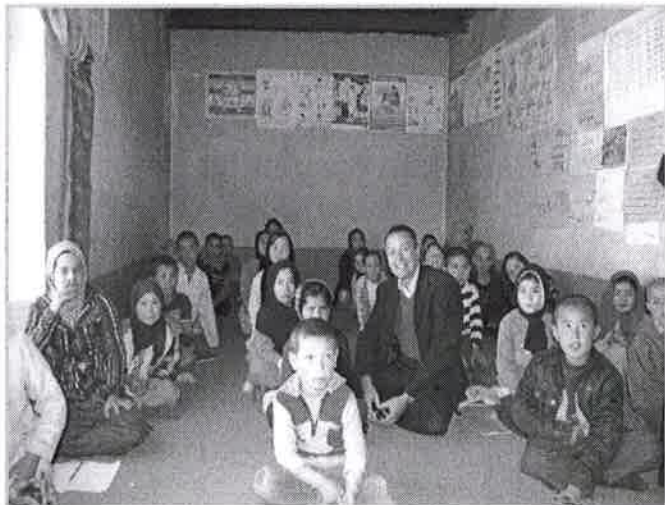
Centre Output	Target	Actual
Accelerated Learning Classes	300	283 (final exam graduates, 339 benefitted from at least 1 grade of teaching)
Homework Support Classes	550	1015 (benefitted from support at some point in the year)
Adult Literacy Classes	160	189
Tailoring Classes	400	363
Basic Health Education	300	200
Peer Educators Trained	5	5
Local teachers Trained	5	5

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### **The Accelerated Learning Classes**

As you may remember, the Accelerated Learning programme is a response to government legislation passed in 2002 that prevents children over the age of nine from enrolling in Grade One of primary school. The legislation was designed to reduce burgeoning class sizes, which while demonstrating the demand for learning, were serving only to damage the quality of education available. However, given the existing demand that children must pass an exam at the end of each grade in order to progress to the next, the 2002 ruling effectively prevents any children over the age nine who are not currently attending a school from ever enrolling. The Accelerated Learning Classes provide the means for these children to complete the first two grades of primary school in 12 months, and therefore enter a State school at Grade Three level, where there is no age-restriction on entry. Encouragingly, in March, 339 children (including 261 girls) enrolled on the classes. Against our initial expectation of 300 children enrolling, we were delighted that so many children, and their parents, were keen to begin their education. The classes follow the national curriculum and so the children initially began their lessons in numeracy, and basic literacy (both Dari and Pashtu).

As well as the excellent enrolment for this year, March also saw 225 of the 240 children who completed last year's Accelerate Learning Classes take up their place in a State school. We have an on-going agreement in place with the Ministry of Education whereby any child completing the Accelerated Learning programme is guaranteed a school place the following year. The successful integration of the children into a school is one of the key aims of the centres, so it was pleasing that so many were able to take up their place. We like to check that the children settle well into their new learning environment and that the Accelerated Learning programme has adequately prepared them. So at the end of April, Farzanah, a member of CIC-Afghanistan (our Kabul office) visited a selection of the 225 children in their new schools. She was pleased to report that they were happy and that their teachers were pleased with both their behaviour and their level of understanding. We are hopeful that the children will go on to pursue their education to the fullest extent possible over the coming years.



**CIC Chief Executive Koy Thompson joins an accelerated learning class.**

Sadly, for the other 15 children, reasons of extreme poverty, perceived and real security threats, their families relocating, and the long distances they would have to travel to school are still very much obstacles to their education. As a result of their year on the programme and our agreement with the Ministry of Education, they will still be able to join a school at Grade Three level wherever they move to and as soon as their family life permits it.

In May, 333 of the 339 children who enrolled in March took their first set of exams. We hold tests at the centres every three months to ensure that the children are progressing and that they will reach Grade Three level by the end of the project year. The results of the tests help us to identify those

that need a bit of extra assistance, and to work more closely with their parents. As you can probably imagine, at Grade One level the tests are fairly basic, but even so, we were very pleased that all 333 children passed. The six children who did not sit the tests had moved away from the centres with their families. Indeed, families are still extremely mobile in Afghanistan, often moving from city to city, and area to area in search of work. We expend considerable time and effort working with parents to convince them of the need for their children to remain settled in their education, but sometimes good will and the likely long-term benefits of education cannot counter the harsh economic and transient reality of life in Afghanistan.

By the time of the next set of exams in late August, the number of children regularly attending the classes was 322 (250 girls and 72 boys). Once again, all those sitting the exams passed, meaning that they had successfully completed Grade One. The fact that the children were able to complete a whole grade of primary school in just six months is testament to their enthusiasm and obvious love of learning.

In early December the children took their final set of exams. 283 children took the final exams this year, below our target of 300 and unfortunately 39 fewer than sat the August exams. Having discussed this with our project team it is believed that the drop-off is due to high levels of movement among these communities during the winter. The levels are higher than we have experienced in previous years because we are working in more deprived areas, populated by families who are particularly vulnerable to displacement to find work, as winter closes in this displacement increases, hence seeing more children being withdrawn from classes. However, all 283 children who sat the exams are expected to pass, with the CBEC teaching staff praising their efforts throughout the year.

These children will be eligible to join government schools in the new year and their families will be supported by project staff who will look to ease the transition into state education as much as possible.

### **The Homework Support Classes**

This year we have experienced an exceptionally high level of demand for the Homework Support Classes. These classes are run for children who already attend a government-run school, but are in danger of falling behind and dropping out, often because they work long hours to supplement the family income, or because their parents are unable to help them with their school work due to their own poor education.

We had initially expected 550 children to attend the classes throughout the year, to receive help across all grades of primary school in a variety of subjects including Maths, English, Art and Calligraphy. As you may be aware, calligraphy has a particularly high status in Afghanistan. At the basic level it is a fun and creative way of improving the children's handwriting and literacy skills, while culturally and religiously it is extremely important, with many versions of the Koran displaying quite beautiful lettering.

Class attendances this year reached a peak of 1015, with December figures citing attendances of 936. The classes have been particularly popular around exam time, with some children attending both the regular support classes throughout the year, and the additional exam support classes. We are delighted by the high level of uptake in the homework support classes.

### Classes for mothers and local women

As you know, the centres also run classes to help parents improve the home life and support structures for their children, and to improve the confidence, skills and earning potential of women and mothers.

189 women have taken part in the literacy classes this year. At the start of the year, we had experienced some resistance from the more conservative communities on the running of these classes for women, but after a prolonged period of discussion with community leaders, the attendances began to steadily rise. Many of the women attending the classes have said that their primary motivation for joining and for improving their reading and writing skills is that they want to meet regularly with other women and to pursue the education that they did not receive as girls. Interacting with people outside of the family is of great value to these women. Sadly, it is not uncommon for women in Kabul to be neighbours for years and to never have the chance to properly meet. With their confidence noticeably growing since joining the classes, some of the women have progressed so well that the classes have been split into two grades. to allow everyone to move forward at a pace that best suits them.

In early May, just after your generous donation in fact, we began running cooking classes for parents. It had become apparent that the children attending the Accelerated Learning Classes were probably not receiving the balanced diet that their growing bodies need, and so parents were asked to complete a survey on what they were feeding their children. Based on the results of the survey it was decided that basic cooking classes focusing on how to cook balanced, filling meals with cheap, widely-available and locally-sourced produce would be extremely beneficial. There are now over 40 parents actively attending the classes and putting into practice what they have been taught. The classes are proving to be an excellent project development, with the parents expressing thanks for the skills they have learned. The classes are also a prime example of the value of consulting and working with parents and offering practical solutions, rather than creating an unsustainable dependency on charities.

The level of interest in the tailoring classes has also been encouraging, 363 women took part during the year. A particularly pleasing aspect of the classes this year is that Frozan, a woman who attended the classes last year, is now teaching and assisting other women. Her commitment to improving not only her lot in life, but also that of the other women in her community is quite commendable. Recent discussions with the women have highlighted that some of their friends were taught tailoring



**Sonia (left) and Shaista (right), two of the young women attending the tailoring classes at the centre in Kuhja Boghra**

skills informally by their mothers or other female relatives, and so they would like us to run other vocational classes at the centres. These discussions may help to explain why we have fallen slightly short of the expected level of 400 women attending. The discussions also serve to highlight the continuing need to assess the relevancy of the classes on offer, especially given that the centres



are often relocated at the end of the year to a new area of the city, where needs may be different.

Over 200 women have been attending the health education meetings at the centres this year. These classes are vitally important given the extremely low level of basic health awareness and understanding in the communities. Indeed, the lack of understanding was particularly evident in the case of one local woman whose baby had developed pneumonia. In response, the baby's chest was tightly covered and she was wrapped in blankets. Unfortunately, this led to severe overheating and breathing problems. Our staff at one of the centres intervened, and explained to the mother the steps that she should take. Thankfully the baby is making a strong recovery and the mother is now attending the classes on a regular basis, and currently receiving relevant prevention information on malaria, HIV and hepatitis.

The Self-Help Group Saving Scheme, through which local women pool their savings and are then able to take loans from the pooled funds for entrepreneurial activities and to meet unexpected costs such as doctors' fees, had initially struggled to recruit the expected number of women. Following extensive community engagement, it became apparent that some women had previously had a bad experience with a micro-finance initiative operated by another charitable organisation. We have worked hard to convince both the women and their husbands of the value of the scheme and as a result, we now have 231 women actively taking part. Within the context of the local economy the women have made considerable savings already and some have even started taking loans from the group. One woman, Nageena, borrowed 500Afn (approx. £7) from the group to buy materials and equipment for her embroidery business, and has already earned 250Afn in additional revenue. Soon Nageena will be in a position to fully repay the loan and to continue growing her fledgling business.

Overall, we are extremely pleased with the work at the centres so far this year. The children are progressing well in the Accelerated Learning Classes, the Homework Support Classes have been incredibly popular, and hundreds of women are benefitting from the classes on offer, and are enjoying the sense of companionship and camaraderie that they have developed.

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### **Peer Educators and Local Teachers**

The peer educator and local teacher systems have been extremely successful this year. With both positions filled at all of the centres. We are also delighted to report far greater success this year in enrolling local teachers in teaching institutes. This year our Project Manager, Mahrouf, was able to briefly talk to each of the local teachers and peer educators to give an impression of who they are and what they are enjoying about working at the centres. This information can be found in Appendix A.

Peer educators have undergone a comprehensive training schedule (as detailed in Appendix B), covering a wide variety of subject which prepare them for a career as a teacher, or other role dealing with children. The training course has been designed in consultation with the Ministry of Education and by Children in Crisis' experienced project managers.

Similarly our local teachers have carried out a comprehensive training course, while practicing vocational training alongside the Children in Crisis teachers. The experience of working in the centres enables them to gain access to teaching institutes where possible. The full training curriculum for the local teachers can be found in Appendix C.

