

April 2011

VUSAF Union of Assistance
for Schools in Afghanistan

Old Hands and Greenhorns – Our Trips to Afghanistan in April 2011

Travelling is not safe in Afghanistan these days, but many of our friends and colleagues want to go and make their own experiences anyway. Therefore, in April, four people closely connected to our committee visited Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Andkhoi: Marga Flader and Leo Heyelmann as well as Ulla Nölle and Rasso Leicher later-on. In Kabul we spent a few days together. At our next annual meeting, Leo Heyelmann will be a candidate for the board. Rasso Leicher, who is a teacher at one of our partner schools and has recently become a member of our committee, is planning another charity event at his school. As you know, Ulla Nölle and Marga Flader have been to Afghanistan many times. As space is limited, the travellers can only write about some very special experiences in this short report.

Ulla Nölle:

It was a wonderful trip, but the desert was not so colourful this spring as I had experienced in the past and as I had wished for. There was not as much rain north of the Hindukush as in the south.

In Mazar-e-Sharif we watched a cheerful football tournament at the school in Chooghdak whose principal I have known from Haripur camp in Pakistan since 1986. The beginning in Mazar-e-Sharif was difficult for him, but now this school is also a very good example of what a school should be like, just as the one in Haripur had been.

We also visited the other schools which VUSAF built in Mazar-e-Sharif and collected letters for the partner schools. This exchange between schools here and there is very important for both sides.

The construction work at Fatema Zahra girls' school was still going on at 5 p.m. and is progressing well. The workers and I were happy to meet once more as we have known each other for a long time. This was the same in Andkhoi. We have worked in that region for so long that it seems we belong there. In the schools, in the Education Centre with its different courses, in the sewing centres and home courses we were greeted happily so that we could talk freely about the achievements and problems. Of course, there are problems which have to be solved, but it is much easier to do that during these visits than from Germany.

Everyone who knows about our "chicken projects" will be glad to hear that we were able to carry out another one: Another 200 families received 18 hens and 2 roosters – a very important help for them. The women are looking after the chickens and experience the good feeling of earning their own money to support their families: on average they earn approx. 50 USD per month.

I could report much more about these nice days, but I only have half a page and so I am closing with my best wishes and the request: Please do not forget us!

Marga Flader:

The most important day for me during this trip was the visit of the school in Qipchok (District of Andkhoi). In December 2007 Ulla Nölle and I visited the school for the first time when the girls and boys were being taught in a rented house. We were asked for a new school building. Since then the community bought the land for a school, built the boundary wall and simple mud buildings. They kept asking us for a proper building for their children. In the end the elders even visited me at our guest house. Last year we were told that some young men had joined the Taliban and that security was so bad that we could not visit the area. However, during this trip we went to see the school, and I was very happy not only to see the new school building, which is almost finished, and many girls in the old classrooms (and one new room which the community had built), but I could also talk to the many village elders who came to see us. They are grateful and promised to ensure that the girls and boys would always be able to go to school in safety. I was very happy that day and everyone else, too.

I was also glad to take part in the inauguration of the new building for Nahr-e-Top High School for Girls in Mazar and grateful that we managed to do this big project (24 classrooms plus auxiliary rooms). However, the next day I

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was shocked to see the terrible conditions under which the girls at Fatema Zahra School are studying now. It is really good that they will also get a proper building. The foundation stone was laid and the construction work has begun.

The many meetings and discussions we had with our colleagues in Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Andkhoi were also very important for me during this trip. We are a good team and we are working well together to improve the education system in Afghanistan.

Leo Heyelmann:

My first trip to Afghanistan accompanying Marga on a project visit – I was eager, curious and confident that everything would be all right. I submerged into a world which up to now had been rather strange to me and emerged again after three weeks enriched by new impressions, adventures and experiences. It is very different to hear or read about an educational project and about the persons involved for many years and then to actually see them personally. Many things became more understandable and clear only now. And so much happened which made me feel close to the people and their environment: For example the nice young teacher of a home school who said that her own mother now attends such a home school to learn to read and write. And the joy we had in the many classes singing "Brother John" together in English, German and finally also in Dari. Or the funny play which the girls of the Education Centre performed about a disdained groom – we did not understand a word, but joined in the laughter. Or the young boy who after I said that in Germany boys and girls are taught together in one class, replied instantly, "That's ok" and made everyone laugh. Or the many requests for additional computer and English courses. Or the happiness everyone felt when we found the tulips we had hoped to see during our outing in Shomali. Or I have lots more to say, but I shall have to do that another time.

All these big and small experiences with the endearing and hospitable people young and old who are eager to learn gave me new strength and encouraged me to continue our work because it is good and necessary.

Rasso Leicher:

The absolute highlight for me as an "Afghanistan-Greenhorn" were the football tournaments in Chooghdak (Mazar-e-Sharif) and Andkhoi. I had brought along 40 footballs signed by the students of Gymnasium Neubiberg while Marga Flader had already organized the purchase of the football outfits (including shoes) for which donations had been made. Everyone who has ever played football can certainly imagine what it means for the young Afghan boys to play in their own new dress for their school team. We had stirring and exciting games with many spectators which led to a lot of discussions. The district governor of Andkhoi gave us the honour and was present during all the games; he was a real expert on football.

During my visits to different schools I was especially impressed by the great motivation and discipline of the boys and girls as well as their teachers who not only gratefully accept the help of the committee but lead it to a wonderful harvest either by passing on the knowledge of the English language, the competence with the computers or their careful use of the teaching materials and much more. These impressions were topped by the great hospitality of the members of VUSAF and the beauty of the country. I will be very happy to tell my students that their donations have fallen on such fruitful grounds and that we should continue to support our friends who live in such difficult conditions on their road to better education.

We would like to thank you for your support in the past and hope that you will continue your help also in the future. The Yuldoz Girls' High School in Andkhoi needs classrooms urgently. Furthermore, our colleagues in Andkhoi have received 17 proposals for the Small Projects Fund for the construction of classrooms, storerooms or toilets. The schools supported by VUSAF would receive 100,000 Afghani if they contribute about the same amount themselves, carry out the project independently and report to us afterwards. We think this kind of support is very good and would like to accept 10 proposals for which we would need USD 22,000! Would you like to support such a project?

Kind regards

Ursula Nölle

Marga Flader

Leo Heyelmann

Rasso Leicher

PS: If you want to receive our annual report (in German) (preferably by mail), please let us know.

PPS: If you do not want to receive these newsletters in the future, send us a short message, please.

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