



# **THE *BUILDING BRIDGES* PROGRAMME**

**JANUARY 2010 TO DECEMBER 2012**

Afghan Action is a charity focusing on training and business incubation, founded in 2005. Our aim is to serve young Afghan men and women from the poorest backgrounds by training them to weave carpets or make clothes and equipping them with literacy and numeracy skills and English, ICT and business skills. Since 2005, we have trained and employed over 800 people at our training and business incubation centre in Kabul. We have also been working in the UK with Afghan diaspora groups and on awareness-raising programmes.

Afghan Action is a registered charity no 1111897 and company limited by guarantee no 5420647.  
Registered Office: 30 Church Road, Woburn Sands MK17 8TA

## **THE *BUILDING BRIDGES* PROGRAMME**

The aim of the 3 year *Building Bridges* programme, which started in January 2010, has been to raise awareness and change perceptions of poverty, security issues and development opportunities in Afghanistan.

Our approach has been to use trained “advocates”, many of them Afghans living in the UK. Most of the advocates were also Muslims with an understanding of the religious and cultural situation of Afghanistan.

Our advocates were provided with training and support in order to enable them, along with our London-based staff, to deliver a range of events and initiatives in 6 regions across the country: London, Eastern England, South West England, West Midlands, Yorkshire and South Wales. Our target was to involve 1500 people over the 3 years and over 1900 people took part in events and initiatives – including over 100 who said they had very little knowledge or awareness about what life is really like in Afghanistan.

The aim has been to provide good information, raise awareness and change attitudes. Although the media reports mainly focus on conflict and corruption in Afghanistan, there are many positive developments taking place in the country and Afghan Action is actively involved, through its Training & Business Incubation Centre in Kabul, in developing good jobs, sustainable businesses and fair markets.

Over the 3 years, the *Building Bridges* programme has benefited from some positive publicity and helped to raise awareness and increase interest in Afghanistan.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

Working with 16 skilled advocates from 6 regions, we have built up a strong relationship with some Afghan and non Afghan groups across the country.

In 2012, we reached **688** people from all ethnic backgrounds and different faith groups.

Our advocates predominantly targeted school children, community groups, women’s groups and faith groups and in each region, events have been held with schools, student groups, faith groups (including churches and madrashas), women’s groups and community groups. In total at least **1911** people have attended our events since the project started. We identified **103** people who said they had very little or no knowledge about development issues in Afghanistan.... until they came to one of our events.

Our public presence has increased significantly. Our Facebook page was liked by 290 people in 2012 - an increase of 34% compared to the previous year. Our Twitter page is followed by 783 people – a 32% increase. Visitors to our website increased by more than 74%. The Building Bridges page had 23192 hits and Afghan Action’s website: Total 43,000 hits.

We’ve now got a new website, [www.afghanaction.org](http://www.afghanaction.org) - simple and very accessible, it also has an e-shop with our products.

The *Building Bridges* programme is being continued by a new charity, Afghan Voice, [www.afqvoice.org](http://www.afqvoice.org)

Dar Al Rahmah Madrasha, Plaistow, East London



*Building Bridges* has been funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the contract managed by Triple Line. Its work complements Afghan Action's awareness raising programme in schools in northern England, led by Jean Harlow (also funded by DFID). Other UK-based work, from which *Building Bridges* has grown, is Afghan Action's work with Afghan diaspora groups in London, funded by Trust for London, and the British Council *Connecting Classrooms* programme with schools in Hammersmith and Kabul, and Harpenden and Mazar e Sharif.

### **THE BUILDING BRIDGES ADVOCATES**



Zabiullah **Maidinzadeh** is based in Leeds. In 1994 Zabiullah graduated from the Technical Vocational Institute and has worked in the UK as an electrician with Vision Alert.



Larisa Taheri is from Afghanistan and is currently living in Leeds. In 2003 she completed her BA in English literature at Kabul University and has worked for various local and international agencies, such as US Embassy, UNDP seconded to Afghan Ministry of Finance, Swiss Embassy and Oxfam UK. Also, during the Taliban regime (1996-2001) she took extreme risks by secretly teaching students aged 6-15 at her home.



Zainab Homam is from Afghanistan and she has been living since 1995 in London. Zainab completed her BSc degree in Business Information at London Metropolitan University. Zainab has worked with various organisations in the UK, including Barking and Dagenham Council, Barclays Bank and the Afghan Community Centre. Zainab can communicate fluently in English, Dari, Arabic and Hindi.



M Javed Iqbal Khan is from Bangladesh and he is currently living in Essex. Javed has recently completed an MSc in Refugee Studies (Law & Development) from London South Bank University. Javed has a BA Hon and MA in Language and Literature from University of Chittagong, Bangladesh and MBA in Marketing from LSBA London. Javed has worked in different multinational organisations in key management positions both at home and abroad. These include the Canadian International Development Agency, American International Investment, Vectone Entertainment Ltd UK and Hefazotho Islam UK. He worked in TV and radio as a news presenter and Head of News in Bangladesh and the UK and can communicate in English, Bengali and Hindi.



Ellen Goodwin is studying for a degree at Leeds University in French, Theology and Religious Studies. She has assisted Afghan Action in the summer holidays helping organise events. She organised one in her home village of Woburn Sands, near Milton Keynes, in October 2012.



**Yasmin Omotosho** has a BA in English Literature from King's College London. Since July 2011 she has been assisting Afghan Action as an advocate and has learned much about Afghanistan through her research into different aspects of Afghan life and culture, including looking at the needs and opportunities for developing work in particular provinces.



**Shahnaz Hakim** has recently migrated from Afghanistan and is now living in Cardiff. In 1991 she completed her BSc at Kabul University and has since worked for various international organisations, including USAID, UN-Habitat, DANIDA, UNOPS, IRC, UNICEF and the US Embassy. Shahnaz is currently working voluntarily with the British Red Cross (BRC), the Welsh Refugee Council and the Society of Afghan Residents in Cardiff and is a founder member of Afghan Voice.



**Mehdi Zahra** is a Year 11 student at Brotton's Academy and has volunteered for Afghan Action for the last three years. She has contributed a great deal by raising awareness about Afghanistan in the UK. Through her dedication and commitment she would like to continue volunteering and help making a difference.

**Fatima Mohammadi** is from Afghanistan and is currently living in Bristol. She has a BA in Political Science and Economics, an MBA in Human Resources and is now studying for an MA in Public Administration at the University of York. Fatima is fluent in four languages, English, Dari, Pashtu and Urdu.

**Ramin Sherzai** has recently moved from Afghanistan and is now living in York. He has a BA in Law and Political Science and is now studying for an MA in Post War Recovery at the University of York,

sponsored by the Chevening Scholarships Programme. In Afghanistan, Ramin worked with USAID and the World Bank. He is fluent in four languages, English, Dari, Pashtu and Urdu.

**Habibullah Hashimi** is based in Cardiff. He graduated from Sanghi High School in Kabul and has worked for various employment agencies in the UK.

**Zia Sorosh Hossiny** is Afghan-British and lives in Southampton. Zia completed his BA in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Hull University. While in Hull, he formed a group of newly arrived Afghan immigrants to brief them about British culture and help them settle. He has also helped many Afghan asylum seekers in Southampton through The Clear Project.

**Sayed Reza** is based in Hull and has completed various English language and computer courses at the University of Hull. He is also currently teaching Dari for Afghan children based in Hull.

**Maryam Omer** is from Afghanistan and is currently living in London. She completed her BA degree in Fashion Design and Realisation at London College of Fashion and has 10 years' retail experience, including 6 years in Visual Merchandising and 2 years as Marketing Manager.

**Nilofar Samadi** is Afghan-British and living in London. She is a student at Queen Anne's School in Caversham, Reading. She has organised 3 events with children in schools and madrashas.

## THE STAFF TEAM



**Rahnuma Noor** works as Project Manager on Afghan Action's *Building Bridges* programme and is a broadcaster and educationalist

Rahnuma writes:

"It has been a pleasure to be a part of the *Building Bridges* project and work for Afghan Action. Our small team have been dedicated and hard working. We have faced many challenges and learned a great deal. Our skilled advocates have helped to change the attitudes of many people about Afghanistan. I would like to say a big thank you to our advocates and my colleagues".

**Yama Wida** works as outreach worker on Afghan Action's *Building Bridges* programme and previously worked for UNDP in Afghanistan. He is also responsible for website development and has set up Afghan Voice.

**Ken Bartlett**, Chair of Afghan Action, is the former Assistant Chief Executive of the Housing Corporation and consultant to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

**Luby Sparber** is the former Head of European Operations at Merrill Lynch and is Afghan Action's Company Secretary and Treasurer

**Chris Beales** has been Chief Executive of Afghan Action since it started in 2005. He is also an Anglican minister with a parish near Milton Keynes, and works with a construction training company in East London.

**Zarlashta Behzadi, Hashim Alavi, Mahboob Iltaf** and **Jean Harlow** also worked on the *Building Bridges* programme with Afghan Action. We are most grateful to them for all they contributed.



A Refugee Awareness Programme in Cardiff Central Library. Shahnaz Hakim has been involved with developing this work with *Building Bridges* Outreach Worker Yama Wida.

Yama and his fellow trustees are developing a new charity, Afghan Voice (see [www.afgvoice.org](http://www.afgvoice.org)), to build on the work of *Building Bridges*.

Outreach Worker Yama Wida, advocate Shapoor Saad and youngsters at the Dar al Rahmah Madrasha



Afghan Handicrafts (Annual Event 2011)

Event in Leeds – Women’s Group

