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Dear Friends and Partners of Shelter Now,

We continue to be astounded by the huge success of our Christmas initiative „10,000 candles for Afghanistan“. Read in our latest report how many candles we actually ended up with.

Our second theme this time is our training project for processing fruit and vegetables. A logical follow-on from the fruit farming project, this initiative is designed to help women earn a living for themselves. Gudrun Göttler reports on an exciting project that is giving hope to Afghan women.

Despite the ongoing negative reports in the media, an opinion poll carried out by the BBC and published in January shows that the number of people in Afghanistan who are now optimistic about the future has risen significantly.

We continue to hope and work with them for a better future. They have a right to it – as much as we do.

Best regards,
Udo Stolte.



SHELTER Report



„Light 10,000 Candles for Afghanistan“ - our candle initiative was a complete success

Shortly before our last Shelter Report went to print, we received an emergency call from Kandahar. Many people, displaced by the fighting, had come there and were now concerned that they would not survive the winter. This led to the idea in our team to sell tealights for two euros each. Two euros is enough to buy food for one person to survive for a month in winter.

The candle idea sparked a huge response: many groups and churches joined us and began selling candles themselves. Donations began pouring into our office. Additional funds from the US were passed to our Kabul office directly. In the end we were able to transfer 54,000 euros from Germany alone to help the refugees. We weren't able to light all the candles – it would have been 27,000 instead of the 10,000 that were originally planned. But the candles were only a symbol. What was more important was what we were able to do with the money:

In five separate distributions, we gave each refugee family 50kg flour and 5kg cooking oil. Many families also received sugar, tea and beans. In Kandahar there were 1,530 families from the wider area, in eastern Afghanistan there were 820 Kuchi families, 709 families from the Chalu people and 43 Nuristani families – altogether over 18,000 people. We are delighted and relieved that we were able to help so many needy refugees survive the winter.

We find again and again that we are suddenly faced with an acute emergency where thousands of people need urgent help that is vital for their survival. Nevertheless, in recent years our activities have shifted increasingly towards long-term development projects. A year ago we wrote about a fruit farming project in Herat. Fruit of course needs to be marketed – selling fresh fruit isn't always possible. Our team member Gudrun Göttler tells us now about a project that developed at the request of our Afghan agricultural engineers:

Providing teaching on how to preserve fruit and vegetables - a long-term project

„The school garden project, which we are conducting together with the aid organization Help, is for refugees returning from Iran and includes instruction on how to preserve fruit and vegetables, through pickling, jam-making and dehydrating. The aim of all our courses is to enable people to eventually earn their own living independently. As it is nigh on impossible for women in this cultural setting to work the land themselves and sell their own produce, we as a team came up with the idea of offering another course tailored to their needs. It was actually a long-held dream of mine to start up a school for home economics and nutrition, but there had never been the time, the money or the venue in which to do it. My new food-processing course is now a school in its infancy, like the starting signal for something new. None of the women are able to read or write, all of them are former refugees to Iran who have now returned home and many of them are widows. They and their families now have to start over right from





scratch. The aim of the course is to enable the women to develop their own source of income, be it through producing things to sell at the local market, combined with their own shop, or a production cooperative set up together with other women.

Refugees become businesswomen

When selecting my 9 students, I focused very much on the aim of the course. It is not about becoming a better cook, but about hard work. Becoming a successful businesswoman, starting with nothing, takes willpower and dedication. In addition to lessons on cooking and nutrition, the women are also taught written Dari and mathematics. It is important that they are able to read and write so that they will later be able to understand and fill out application forms. Our female Afghan teacher also instructs the women in arithmetic and basic accounting, as obviously these are skills they need if they are to run a business successfully long-term.

We find we laugh a lot during the course. We are learning together and from each other. I am learning together with the women how to write Dari, so I sit next to them in class, that is bringing us closer together. I then teach them kitchen skills, and about nutrition and vitamins, while they teach me how to formulate proper sentences in Dari. I learn all kinds of new words but then tend to forget them. But that makes me more of a sister to them rather than some superhuman from the West.



Trying out new recipes and avoiding sicknesses

Once we have completed a recipe, then comes the critical step of tasting it. Afghans have very different tastes, and there's always a certain amount of trepidation on my part, as I wonder whether this latest product will pass the test or not. There's usually an „Ah“ and an „Oh“, but sometimes they pull faces too. But we usually end up satisfied. Things that are not such a hit we modify, in an effort to adapt them more to the Afghan palate. One time we used mulberry juice, that I had boiled up especially for this purpose during the summer, to produce a delicious jelly. One of the students was particularly delighted and said „now I finally know what to do with all the mulberries that we have back home. Until now they just got eaten up by the chickens and sheep. They won't cost me anything, and I'm sure the jelly will sell well.“

Illnesses caused through poor nutrition, such as stomach problems, are common in Afghanistan. Often during the lesson I'll hear statements like „I'm so happy to know what I can do differently to improve things“ or „No one teaches us things like this, I'm so happy that I will be able to help my family with what I've learned“, or „I would never have thought that you could eat such things, and I'm sure they'd sell well – pumpkin jam is cheap and delicious, I'm definitely going to make that.“



Everything that we make during the course gets eaten. In the interests of „market research“, we also give it out to others to try, to find out what is likely to sell best.

Today we have been marinating beetroot – all grown in our school garden. The Afghans love my marinated beetroot. This spring we will also be planting beetroot in the „Saodat“ cooperative, our new project for refugees returning from Iran. Our course will later buy the beetroot from the cooperative and prepare them ready to be sold at the market in Herat. The next step then will be to teach the women at the cooperative how to make the „turushi lablabu surch“ so that they can sell it in their neighborhoods.

Further goals – improving the framework of social structures

I am learning a lot during this first course. I intend to make a number improvements for next time round. In the meantime there are still plenty of hurdles to overcome, such as finding suitable jars for a reasonable price etc. The course is just a beginning, there are lots of ideas; maybe it will become a school for home economics or simply a course for those who are interested. What's important to me is that the production and preparation of food for sale are kept

together and that people find a new way of generating income for their families. Cooperatives allow us to improve the social infrastructure and build trust amongst the Afghans themselves.

The students are highly motivated. We've only had oral tests so far which have gone very well. It is amazing how well they retain things – which is of course partly thanks to the dedication of our Afghan teacher Khanume Roqia. She herself grew up in Iran and returned to Afghanistan to study.

I would be very happy to keep you informed about our project, perhaps you'd be interested in the recipe for pumpkin jam...”

That was Gudrun Göttler in Herat. We are very pleased to have such motivated and dedicated workers. If you would like to support our agricultural startup aid projects, such as the one introduced today, you find the details under here or www.shelter-now.org/donations/. We are grateful for all the donations we receive, and would like to say thank you not least on behalf of all the Afghan women, men and children who have been given fresh hope and a brighter future as a result.

Best regards
Udo Stolte and the Shelter Team

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Refugee kids in Kandahar

