BUILDING A VOICE FOR WOMEN: ONE CLUB CONTINUES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

*University Women Helping Afghan Women*

A Canadian Federation of University Women-Ottawa International Project at Gawharshad University, Kabul, Afghanistan

Some of our current UWHAW Scholarship Girls at Gawharshad University,
Some former UWHAW Graduates but sadly recent graduation ceremonies have become a security issue.

*University Women Helping Afghan Women Acts as Both a Study and Interest Group and as an External Outreach Group*

CFUW-Ottawa hosted the 2010 CFUW National AGM. Our theme was “Value the past: Shape the Future”. As we reviewed CFUW’s remarkable one hundred-year history, we looked within our Canadian borders and beyond to see where we could support other women shaping their future. Our example and focus led to Afghanistan, where Canada was serving as part of the NATO forces there. Special AGM guest, Dr. Sima Samar (physician and Human Rights activist) communicated so movingly and intelligently the lack of human rights for Afghan women that many hearts, minds, and eyes were opened. We learned that the best way we could empower young Afghan women was through education and so several CFUW-Ottawa members joined together to form *University Women Helping Afghan Women*. University Women Helping Afghan Women continues to work to:

- Learn about the issues facing women and girls in Afghanistan
- Raise awareness of such locally, nationally and internationally
- And to support the women and girls how we can, especially through scholarships for tertiary education at Dr. Samar’s Gawharshad University in Kabul

1. We continue to learn about issues facing Afghan women ourselves. We hold monthly events with stimulating speakers and discussion.
2. We raise public awareness on the issues facing Afghan Women and Girls.

We accept speaking engagements and work locally, nationally and internationally to raise public awareness of the issues facing Afghan women and girls. We have presented at the Graduate Women International Triennial Conference in Istanbul, at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York, at the Women Graduates-USA AGM in Salt Lake City, at AAUW in Connecticut, on electronic meetings, at areas clubs, at CFUW AGMs across the country, and most recently at the CW4WAfghan Symposium and AGM in Harrison Hot Springs, British Colombia.
Over the years we have developed an extensive network of contacts. We keep in touch with members doing similar work in other Graduate Women International NFAs around the world, and with the CFUW National Afghanistan Study Group. We are fortunate to live in Ottawa where we have access to the superb resources of Global Affairs Canada, the Embassy of Afghanistan, the universities, and NGOs like the Aga Khan Foundation. Over the years Canadian Ambassadors to Afghanistan including Chris Alexander, William Crosbie, Deborah Lyons, Kenneth Neufeld and Francois Rivest, and Ambassadors of Afghanistan to Canada, including most recently, H.E. Ambassador Soroosh, have supported our work and attended our events. In addition, our participation at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has introduced us to significant Afghan NGO leaders and opened doors to opportunities at the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan in New York.

From top left, Event Guests over the years include: a former Canadian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Chris Alexander, activist and journalist, Sally Armstrong, other former Canadian Ambassadors Deborah Lyons & Kenneth Neufeld, Minister Monsef, Patricia Leidl, and former Afghanistan Ambassador to Canada, H.E. Shinkai Karokhail, Diane Harper Executive Director, Afghanistan Division Global Affairs Canada, Minister Monsef, former Ambassador Rivest, current Ambassador of Afghanistan to the United States H.E. Roya Rahmani, and former Canadian Ambassador of Canada to Afghanistan, William Crosby.
3. We fundraise to raise scholarships for girls at Gawharshad University, and the postgraduate Fran Manning Scholarship in women’s defense Law.

We hold bridge luncheons, and used book sales at our General Meetings. In 2019 our main fundraisers were the Musical Lunch & Silent Auction, and a new and very successful initiative, the Dinner for Hope. Both are to be repeated in 2020.
Over the last years we have held several *Summer Evening Garden Receptions, and Autumn Colours/Afghan Talk/ Sunday Suppers* in a member's home.

Fundraising proceeds go directly to Dr. Samar's Gawharshad University in Kabul to provide scholarships for carefully selected underprivileged young women who are determined to make a difference in the country they call home, and also the Fran Manning Post Graduate Scholarship in Women's Defense law.

UWHAW Scholarship Students with Dr. Samar, Gawharshad University founder and UWHAW mentor

The two current Fran Manning Post Graduate Scholarship Students in Women’s Defense Law

Photos Courtesy of: Sandy Millen, Lizz Wilfert, Alison Hobbs, Alice Bolt, Ulle Baum, David Bickerton and Gawharshad University