



### From the Editor

*I am not a great friend of social media, but on occasions I have to visit them because someone tells me that there is a mention of Afghanistan. Of course, when that happens it is mostly because they pick up a report on a terrorist attack or another atrocity. But what distresses me nearly as much as the reports on the terrible events are the comments people post next to them.*

*When Facebook reported that "gunmen dressed as medical staff stormed a military hospital in Kabul, killing at least 30 people" social media users showed their ignorance by painting the Afghan people as uncivilized with the wrong state of mind:*

*"This tragedy is a symptom of the disease gripping countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. ... What Afghans (sic) also need to do is ... change the way they think." – "The people of these countries are creating a hell through their negative thinking which has unfortunately become a part of their culture." – "They have been thru so many decades of war that there is no civilized society. All who can leave have done so and the struggle of the desperate seems to never stop." And the last statement comes from someone who eight years ago was a determined supporter of AFCECO, even travelled to Kabul to visit AFCECO's orphanages, and still uses a photo of her surrounded by AFCECO orphans as her cover photo on Facebook!*

*Is it the "negative thinking" of Afghans that produces suicide bombers and terror attacks, or do they come from the Saudi, Pakistani and other foreigners who try to import ISIS into Afghanistan, and from the Taliban who invade the country from Pakistan, not to mention the foreign drones and military activity?*

*If "all who can leave" would have done so, how would our sister organisations AFCECO and OPAWC be able to operate? Several of their staff have been to conferences and fundraising drives in the USA, Italy, Germany, Australia and other countries and had many opportunities to stay in the affluent West, yet they always decide to go back to danger, to contribute to the building of a new and better Afghanistan.*

*The doctors and medical staff in Hamoon Clinic – wouldn't they be the first to be tempted to escape from violent Farah province and leave their patients to their fate? Yet, despite the need for occasional sudden evacuation to Herat when the Taliban threaten, they stay and devote their lives to improving the lives of poor people.*

*Being inundated with human-made disasters in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya it is easy for us to forget the fate of Afghanistan. If the only source of news about Afghanistan are stories from the press and social media it is no wonder that our image of Afghanistan turns dark and darker. Our press prefers sensational reporting. Social media assist in spreading their news, and the everyday quiet achievements of the forces of progress do not provide the right fodder for their journalists. But if we say "all is lost" and give up our support we unwillingly help the forces of fundamentalist terror.*

*This has been a longer message from the editor than usual, but it had to be written. I hope when you hear or see the next disaster report from Afghanistan it will come back to your mind and make you think: "There are also positive developments in that country." You can find them at <https://www.facebook.com/SAWA.Australia.SA>.*

### Another student sponsorship

One of our supporters in Rosanna, Victoria, has taken up a sponsorship for Saeeda, one of the AFCECO students who finished high school and are entering tertiary studies. Saeeda already entered university this year to study Pashto literature and hopes to finish her degree at the end of 2018.



Saeeda was born in a Peshawar refugee camp where she attended an Afghan school for refugees. Saeeda's family had a hard life there and eventually moved to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime. Her hometown is called Dare-Noor, which is a very poor area of Jalalabad. Saeeda first joined an AFCECO orphanage in Jalalabad. After the orphanage closed she moved to an orphanage in Kabul. She graduated from high school in early 2015 and started working for AFCECO, just like other AFCECO university students. She now works in AFCECO's finance department as an accountant. Saeeda is also outstanding in sport and is the goal keeper in AFCECO girl's football team. She won several awards in different tournaments and competitions with other teams across Kabul. In early 2017 she enrolled at university to study Pashto literature.

### Afghanistan: Living Beneath the Drones

In July 2015 Qatar-based Aljazeera TV broadcast a 28 minute report on the effect of drones on the Afghan population. *Living Beneath the Drones* was produced by British documentary film maker Jamie Doran and award-winning Afghan journalist Najubullah Quraishi. It follows Quraishi, who has reported on the war in Afghanistan since 2001, as he uncovers his country's dire mental health situation and the impact and trauma caused by conflict and the newest weapon of war - drones, which constantly fly overhead.

Twenty-eight-year-old Sadiqullah worked as a cook in a hotel in Afghanistan's Pech District when US drones targeting Taliban



fighters hit the area. Lots of people in the restaurant were killed in front of his eyes. Six years later, Sadiquallah continues to replay the horror of that attack in his mind. Seated on a woven cot in the courtyard of his family's home in Jalalabad, Sadiquallah exhibits the acute symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trapped in a cycle of mental distress and beating his chest and weeping.



*Sadiquallah and his brother, who sold his house to have Sadiquallah treated, without success. He is still US\$7,000 in debt.*

There are many others like Sadiquallah; over 60 per cent of the population suffers from a mental health problem.

Afghanistan is the most heavily drone-bombed country in the world with over 1,000 known attacks from 2008 to 2012. According to US Central Command figures during this period there were also over 36,000 armed drone flights - an average of 25 a day.

Many foreign soldiers returning to the West devastated by war have been diagnosed with PTSD. But for the people of Afghanistan, where there is no escape from the conflict, there is little help for people who need psychological care. A social stigma associated with mental illness also discourages many from seeking help in the first place.

Quraishi meets Dr Mohammed Nader Alimi, a psychologist who helped establish the country's only specialist mental health hospital, and sees thousands of patients a year. He treats civilians, soldiers, and even Taliban fighters.

The film includes critical commentary from Peter Singer, a US expert on robotics warfare and drones, and remarks from retired US Air Force General David Deptula, who introduced the drone programme to Afghanistan and claims it is the safest form of modern warfare.

But even when they do not strike, the drones' very presence terrifies and the uncertainty of not knowing whether they could attack at any moment has exacted a steep psychological price.

In the documentary Quraishi speaks to drone attack survivors and their families. He uncovers one of the darkest channels for psychological treatment. Some families, desperate to help their relatives, take them to religious shrines. But patients there are treated more like criminals and they are shackled in cells. The shrine guardians, with little knowledge of Islam and no medical training, claim to "cure" people with charms and prayers.

*Living Beneath the Drones* is a dramatic look at people's stories, a powerful and urgent examination of mental health in Afghanistan and the reality of imprisonment by the omnipresence of drones. It can be watched online through Aljazeera's special series channel at <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2015/07/living-beneath-drones-150719090817219.html> but is not recommended if you cannot stomach traumatic scenes.

Now that the Trump administration has declared Afghanistan a test range for its biggest non-nuclear bombs that have never been used elsewhere before we can only expect that the distress and psychological suffering of the population will escalate. For once we have to agree with ex-president Karzai: "The USA must leave Afghanistan!"

Some text adapted from Aljazeera.

## Entertainment books available again

The new Entertainment books for 2017/18 have arrived and can be purchased from the SAWA (SA) online shop. Every book contains hundreds of lunch and dinner vouchers, two for one offers for movies, concerts and theatre, special accommodation deals in many cities and much more. You will find it excellent value for your region; having dinner for two only twice will often already recoup the price of the book, and you will continue to save and save for 12 months.

You have the choice of the hard copy edition or the digital edition for your Apple or Android device at the same price (between \$60 and \$70 depending on the region), and **20% of the price goes to SAWA-Australia (SA)**. The digital edition is particularly convenient because it shows you participating restaurants and venues in your vicinity. One digital edition is valid for two devices, so you can share it with a friend.

Entertainment books are available for

**SA:** Adelaide

**NSW:** Sydney, Greater West, Newcastle & Central Coast, NSW South Coast, Gold Coast & northern NSW

**ACT:** Canberra

**Vic:** Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat

**Qld:** Brisbane and Sunshine Coast, Cairns and Port Douglas, Townsville

**WA:** Perth

**Tas:** Hobart, Launceston

**NT:** Darwin



*the book (left) and app (right)*

Order your book from <http://www.sawa-australia.org/shop>

## Zarina's art project needs a boost



As reported in earlier SAWAN editions, AFCECO student Zarmina studied sculpture at Kabul University and hopes to thank Australia for her scholarship by making two identical sculptures to show the friendship between the women of Afghanistan and Australia. She plans to install one of the sculptures in the courtyard of the AFCECO orphanage in Kabul and to send the other one to Adelaide, where it will be erected in an appropriate place to be seen by the public.

To make her plan a reality she needs some financial support, so we started a crowd funding drive for materials and an airline ticket to get Zarmina to Adelaide to deliver her work.

The drive began in early April and runs through to the end of May. We have been successful with crowd funding

drives before – remember our first drive to produce our *Two Trees* art book and our second drive to buy an ambulance for Hamoon Clinic; both raised well over \$12,000 each – but our support for Zarmina is not doing well, and unless we receive more help from generous supporters we may not achieve our aim. We have to reach our target before the month is out, so please visit our crowd funding page for Zarmina at <https://pozible.com/project/zarminas-art-project> and pledge your support. The page has much more information, including a short movie about the project. Even the smallest pledge can help us to reach our target. It would be really disappointing if Zarmina cannot express her thanks to SAWA through her art.



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**Patron: Penny Wright, previously SA Senator and member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights**

**Partner NGOs: OPAWC (Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities), AFCECO (Afghan Child Education and Care Organization)**

## A loyal member passed away

Helen Fletcher, one of our most supportive members, died after a short battle with cancer on 8 February. Helen was involved with SAWA from the start, or at least from 2005. She served as a committee member from 2008 until 2010. Before she joined the committee she worked in 2007 to establish links between SAWA and Zonta. As the Dean of Flinders accommodation she made the resident students aware of the plight of Afghanistan's women by organising social events such as a special quiz about Afghanistan, with the proceeds going to SAWA.

In 2010 Helen resigned from the committee because of her many other activities but continued to attend our AGMs until 2014. She always promoted SAWA activities by sending our flyers and posters around to her contacts, the last one an invitation to a concert less than a year ago (2016). Helen was a steadfast supporter of SAWA and valued by all. Her radiant smile and heart-warming friendship will be missed by many.



*Helen Fletcher (front right) next to her late mother at the SAWA (SA) quiz night, November 2011*

## Graduation at the Vocational Training Centre



The tenth graduation celebration was delayed because in mid-2016 the new Minister of Education had put all contracts with NGOs on hold, including the contract with OPAWC. The function was finally

held on Monday 23 January 2017. Merit and Completion Certificates were given to 182 students.

The day was a very special day for the students, who had learned thousands of new things, thus making changes to their lives, turning them from beggars into confident women. They celebrated their graduation with enthusiasm.

Most of the students who had learned literacy and handicraft skills in OPAWC's Training Centres participated in the program, but more importantly the women prepared and handled the entire event themselves and provided a most interesting program.

OPAWC executive director Latifa Ahmady gave brief but important information about the current situation of women in Afghanistan and the importance of learning for the women.

Several guests gave speeches, among them General Saber Aryan from the 5th department of the security police, Marukh Usifzai the head of social coordination of the Women's Ministry, and Mr Zafari the representative of the Literacy Department of the Ministry of Education. All speakers praised OPAWC and gave it high scores for its work.

## International Women's Day at Hamoon Clinic

International Women's Day is the day of solidarity of women across the globe. On this day the organizations, parties and democratic and revolutionary individuals, especially those freedom loving women who struggle for their rights, vow once again to continue their tireless efforts for women's rights and equality.

OPAWC has been a pioneer in all issues related to women and has been active in all social programs to raise its voice and to defend the women to every degree possible.

This year OPAWC celebrated International Women's Day in four provinces: Kabul, Heart, Farah and Nangarhar. Each province had its separate program with speeches, national songs and theatre performance. The themes of all speeches were approximately the same, about the present worsening of conditions for women and the bad situation of the country in general.

The celebration in Hamoon Health Center in Farah Province was different from those in other provinces. Staff and patients took an active part in it and held an all-encompassing function. The staff expressed their solidarity with the families of doctors and patients who were martyred in the recent attacks on the Military Hospital, where more than 250 professional doctors, nurses and patients were killed and more than 500 wounded.



*German women's activist Clara Zetkin, one of the founders of International Women's Day, is seen as part of a slideshow on the history of In the day in Hamoon Clinic*

The function in other provinces including Kabul were held in the presence of guests from related ministries and foreigner supporters. OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady said: "I congratulate you on this important day and warmly hold the hands of all freedom loving women. OPAWC's experience shows that if opportunities are given to women they have the capability to play their role in political, economical and social fields even better than men." Speaking about Afghanistan she said: "We witness violence against women in every corner of the country and we should know that the domestic violence is not a separate issue from the political system of the country. The women are still exchanged with animals, they are sexually abused, they are stoned to death. But we women should not be without hope, we should not lose courage as we know where there is war there is struggle. We women must struggle fearlessly and be strong in our decision to enhance our knowledge and become self-confident so we can break the chains of barbarism and slavery."



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SAWA made a foundational decision to help Afghan women by supporting them to help themselves and to source our aid projects through progressive Afghan women's organisations. We believe such organisations are in the best position to understand the needs of women and ways of helping them effectively and efficiently. In the complex economic, social and cultural situation of war-torn Afghanistan, it is difficult for non-Afghans to be fully aware of issues and to make the most appropriate decisions.

At Medecins Sans Frontieres' IWD seminar in Sydney in March, on Afghan women's health issues, SAWA-NSW's committee heard a strong endorsement of our policy by Dr Nadera Hayat Burhani. This former Deputy Minister of Public Health (maternal and child health) in Afghanistan, recounted her Department's initial excitement at a large offer of foreign financial assistance. When it arrived, it was clear that the money would be allocated not to Afghan workers, but only to the high salaries of eight foreign experts who would each visit for six months and compile reports. Dr Burhani recounted that this did virtually nothing to enhance existing Afghan planning for the health system and especially did nothing for the known pressing need to build a system of local primary health clinics delivering help where it was most needed.

SAWA has chosen to work through OPAWC (Organization Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities). A group of Afghan women eager to do something proactive, concrete and achievable to empower Afghan women founded this organisation in 2003. They aim to help in immediate ways while building a sustainable long term framework to strengthen women to be able to escape a vicious cycle of dependence and victimization in a male dominated and fundamentalist social structure. OPAWC's programs focus simultaneously on literacy, practical wage earning skills and health in the belief that if a significant number of women have access to these basic human rights, their eventual social equality could be won.

The Centre for Women in Nangarhar Province, which SAWA-NSW funds, is a good example of the OPAWC's model which has organised hundreds of literacy classes across the country from back rooms to schoolrooms, wherever women can meet,



safe from the forces that would stop their pursuit of knowledge. The centre we fund is in a couple of backrooms furnished with computers and solar power to keep them running. It teaches English and computer skills and also provides wider input on women's rights and health issues. As reported in the last SAWAN, there was an overwhelming demand from local women for the first 60 places in the small centre.

OPAWC's other projects include income-generating projects which do not require a high level of education, such as poultry farms, tailoring, carpet weaving and handicrafts. It has also organised medical clinics with remote area mobile health teams, orphanages, schools at refugee camps in Pakistan, and reconstruction projects such as providing power supply to villages. Always, women are encouraged to speak out for their rights, to stand before a crowd and inform the public of their plight and their mission to become productive, contributing, equal members of a civil society.

## RECENT EVENTS

### Birthing Kit Day

Our assembly day at the Leichhardt Rowing Club was very successful. About forty people attended and 1000 kits were produced in good time. The process was helped by the folding of plastic sheets



before the event, the useful photographs of the steps in assembly supplied by the Birthing Kit Foundation and designating a group to remove surplus air with straws to reduce the bulk of the kits. The excellent morning tea was supplied by Bronwyn Monro and others. Bronwyn's jam also sold very well on the day. Donations for birthing kits exceeded the necessary \$3,000 and the small surplus will help next year.

## DATES FOR DIARY

**Afghan lunch at Bamiyan Restaurant - Tuesday 9th May 2017**, 12 noon for 12.30, 175 First Avenue, Five Dock. Cost \$60 per person. This opportunity to taste excellent Afghan cuisine has become a very popular event in SAWA-NSW's calendar.

Please book ahead by *email*: [bookings.nsw@sawa-australia.org](mailto:bookings.nsw@sawa-australia.org) or *phone*: Shirley, 9818 5319

Direct Deposit to Bendigo Bank Rozelle, BSB 633-000 A/C 1413 97471 Ref: surname and Bamiyan  
Cheques to SAWA-Australia(NSW).PO Box 1741 ROZELLE 2039

**Dinner and Silent Auction Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July** at the Leichhardt Rowing Club.

**Mid November Annual Lunch** Details later.

*Above: showing assembling and components of the kits.*

*Left: The group having finished assembling 1000 kits.*

*Again we thank Jenny Templin of Jenny Templin Photography for her generosity taking and giving SAWA the photos.*