



From the Editor

Greetings to all SAWA members and supporters for 2020. The start of a new year brings renewed energy and commitment and SAWA-Australia is already moving forward, having addressed the challenges of last year and consolidating plans for the future.

The Report (below) from the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul shows us how vital our ongoing work is to the women and girls of Afghanistan. There are inspiring stories of the changes that education and skills-training have brought to the lives of the women assisted by the VTC. We trust that, with your ongoing support, we can maintain – or exceed – the funds we send to the Organisation Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities (OPAWC) at this time each year. Our heartfelt thanks go to everyone for your commitment.

I have recently joined the SAWA-SA Committee and taken on the role of SAWAN Editor. I will do my best to maintain the high standards set by Matthias Tomczak and other Committee members in both SA and NSW and I look forward to continuing to share news from Afghanistan, as well as updates on local SAWA activities.

Margaret Gadd, SA

The 2019 VTC Annual Report highlights some significant changes and achievements. (from Mursal Rahemi: OPAWC Director)

OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre (VTC), began operating in 2008, providing assistance to the community in the Afshar district, the poorest area of Kabul. Almost 90% of the centre's beneficiaries are from this area. Since its inception, SAWA-Australia has remained the prime donor for the VTC, contributing an average of \$50,000 annually. In 2019 SAWA-Australia donated USD \$40,934 with the primary aim of providing literacy classes for Afghan women and girls.



Changes in 2019: This year has seen a shift in focus from literacy to income-generating skills of

embroidery, tailoring, production and marketing. With the political turmoil and continuous wars with the Taliban and ISIS resulting in increased economic instability, the women wanted quicker ways to earn money to support their families – although some literacy classes are still being taught, mainly for the younger girls.

The new skills programs are in two parts:

- 1 **Vocational Training:** The first phase where women are trained in tailoring and embroidery.
- 2 **Production (Manufacturing and sale):** The second phase which helps women produce good quality handcraft products for sale. Three wholesale vendors in Kabul have so far made a deal with OPAWC to buy our products, placing special orders for specific items. The production phase is still in the early stages and it is expected to grow and improve in 2020.

Tailoring: We hired a master tailor for training and a professional designer for production. Around 160 students are learning tailoring. These students are divided into levels, the first being for young girls learning the basics, up to the advanced level for experienced women who learn how to make pant suits and coats.

Embroidery:

There are two embroidery workshops at VTC equipped with 10 embroidering machines. The women can also learn to produce handmade embroidery items. 40 women and girls are benefiting from this program. We hired a trainer for embroidery as well. The trainer knows the local market and has years of experience in this field.



Production Workshop: In the past, women received only some basic training in handicrafts and were then left to run their businesses on their own. As a result, they could setup a small tailoring shop in their homes, but they often had difficulty in finding customers and maintaining their shops.



We have now allocated a large room at the basement as a production workshop where women are helped to make handicraft items for sale. Around 80 women

can work simultaneously, using the machines and equipment, while the designer and master tailor supervise their work.

Since we began this section very recently, it is too early to talk about the profit. We plan to expand this section and get new equipment next year and will develop a business plan for it. Our goal is to let the women have a share of profit. As a result of this activity 120 women and girls have learned sewing and embroidering skills. It is bringing a big change in their lives. Today most of them are able to make women's and children's clothes in their homes and earn money.

Literacy classes: Two literacy classes are continuing in our community centre, with 65 women and girls benefiting from this program. Most are now able to read and write and are interested in continuing their education after graduation from the VTC.

Special Events during 2019: On Afghanistan's Independence Day, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock organized a big exhibition in Kabul. We attended this event, renting a booth for 3 days to exhibit and sell handicrafts made by OPAWC's students.

Challenges and Achievements: The biggest problem we continue to face is the security problem.

A few stories from the VTC's students demonstrate the positive outcomes being achieved.

Samina, aged 18: *I was born in Wardak province of Afghanistan. When I was very young the Taliban closed down all-girls school in our village. The severity of insecurity forced us to leave our home and come to Kabul. We lost our everything in Wardak, and living in Kabul is very difficult for us. We are six persons in the family and my father is the only one to run our family life. A few months ago, I started literacy class and now*



I am able to read and write. I plan to start studying school after graduation from OPAWC. The biggest lesson I learned from OPAWCs Community centre is that women need to

work alongside men in order to have a better life.

Nazia, aged 19:

I am from Wardak Province of Afghanistan. We are 9 persons in our family and all of us are illiterate. 6 years ago we moved to Kabul. My father searched a lot to find a job but unfortunately he couldn't. Finally he decided to go Iran and work there to feed the family. This year we came to one of the poorer districts of Kabul due to insufficient money, and fortunately here we learned about OPAWC Center which provided us literacy and vocational skills. Now I and my younger sister have both learned how to read and write and after passing few months I will attend public school.



Parwana, aged 38

I am from the Paghman district of Kabul. I am mother of two girls and two boys. My husband is illiterate and he is jobless since 2015. Life was very difficult for me before I learned sewing skills. Most of the time I did not have the treatment money for my children and it was even difficult for me to find dry bread to feed my baby's belly. I earned a little



money by cleaning and washing clothes in people's homes. Now I'm happy to learn sewing skills and I earn enough money through tailoring at home and it helps me to

make a better life for my family.

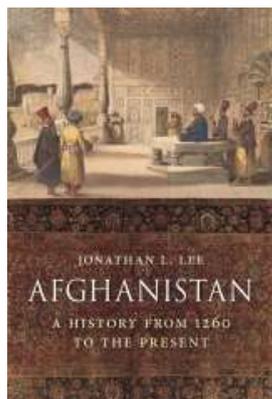
Humaira (aged 32) Sohaila (27) Roma (21) and Rawzia (12) are four sisters from Wardak Province. They lost all their family members in one of the Taliban attacks in Wardak. Now they live together in a rented house. Sohaila and Humaira learned sewing and embroidering skills and now they make Afghani cloths for women and children and earn money. Now they can run their lives easily. They also decided to open a shop in one of the women's bazars in Kabul.



BOOK REVIEWS

Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present Jonathan L. Lee, Reaktion, \$69.99

Described as a “monumental new book” by reviewer William Maley, Professor of Diplomacy at ANU, this book provides “detailed but accessible research of the highest quality”.



Maley hails Jonathan Lee as a renowned scholar who has blended an eye for detail with a sense of the broad sweep of Afghanistan's history in this, his latest book. The full review can be found at <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/afghanistan-an-a-tortured-land-with-an-uncertain-future-20190703-p523v6.html> but a few excerpts here may encourage you to read the longer article, and then seek out the book itself.

Professor Maley writes:

“One attractive feature of Lee's book is that Afghans are at the heart of the story that he tells. ... Moreover, he very effectively conveys a point that is easily missed, namely that the vast majority of Afghans have played no significant role in generating the disorder, even the carnage, that they and their country have experienced over the past four decades.”

In conclusion, Lee's history ends on a sobering note: “The jury is still out as to whether Afghanistan in its present form will survive or if it will revert to rival, self-governing fiefdoms once foreign funding and military support is withdrawn..... The only political solution offered by the international community boils down to a power-sharing agreement with the Taliban, Hikmatyar and other radical Islamic jihadists. For Afghans, especially Shi'as, Hazaras, Uzbeks and women, such a coalition is even more frightening than the continuation of the insurgency.” One hopes that those in positions of power in Western capitals take this sombre warning on board.



Illustration from the book shows schoolgirls in Kabul hurrying past a How-to-Vote poster. (Credit ALAMY)

(William Maley's own book *Transition in Afghanistan: Hope, Despair and Statebuilding*, is published by Taylor & Francis.)

Voice of Rebellion, the biography of **Mozhdah Jamalzadah**, by Roberta Staley, published by Greystone Books in November 2019.

This book tells the first-ever biography of Mozhdah Jamalzadah: refugee, pop singer, and champion of women's rights.

Many have tried to silence her, but Mozhdah Jamalzadah remains the most powerful female voice of her generation in Afghanistan, boldly speaking out about women's rights. *Voice of Rebellion* charts her incredible journey, including arriving in Canada as a child refugee, setting her father's protest poem to music (and making it a #1 hit), performing that song for Michelle and Barack Obama, and, finally, being invited to host her own show in Afghanistan. *The Mozhdah Show* earned her the nickname “The Oprah of Afghanistan” and tackled taboo subjects like divorce and domestic violence for the first time in the country's history. But even as her words resonated with women and families, Mozhdah received angry death threats—some of them serious—and she was eventually advised to return to Canada. (Greystone Books)

“As a woman there, you're pretty much voiceless. Maybe I can't do anything in Afghanistan, but I can in Canada.” Mozhdah Jamalzadah

For more of Mozhdah's remarkable story, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2019/oct/30/mozhdah-jamalzadah-afghanistan-oprah-winfrey>

Writer, Roberta Staley is a magazine editor, writer, and documentary filmmaker. Her award-winning documentary, *Mightier Than the Sword*, reveals how Afghan women in media are working to overcome a culture of silence and invisibility.

For further reading or listening

'The first foreign lawyer to practice in Afghanistan' – available on the ABC listen app <http://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/conversations/kimberley-motley/11451186>

An article about Afghan widows: With few livelihood options, Afghan widows are also generally denied a share of land and property, even though these rights are recognised in the Afghan constitution <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/after-four-decades-war-afghan-widows-battle-homes>



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

News from the Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held on 19 November 2019. 15 members and supporters enjoyed a convivial evening at Afghani Restaurant, Rumi Palace. After expenses, the evening boosted SAWA funds by \$65.

- The Finance Report indicated that \$31,000 is held in a Term Deposit. This, plus additional funds will be sent to Afghanistan in February 2020.
- **Margaret Gadd** and **Fahranaz Haidiri** were elected to the SAWA-SA Committee, and **Julie Irwin** appointed as Zonta coordinator.
- **The Annual Report 2018/2019** will be completed soon and uploaded to the website.

Secretary's Report: AGM 2019

In opening her Report, **Christine Gamble**, Secretary SAWA-SA, paid tribute to the work and generous support of Matthias Tomczak who died in 2019.

.... At the news of Matthias' death, there were moving gatherings across Afghanistan and Australia as family, friends, colleagues, the students and teachers of the VTC and young people and staff of AFCECO (Afghan Child Education and Care Organisation) came together to mourn, pay tribute and celebrate the life of Matthias. Time brought to light the extent of generous financial support Matthias gave to his beloved communities in Afghanistan. This was along with his care and devotion combined with his practical, entrepreneurial skill-set. Matthias was a wise and kind benefactor supported by Christine Tomczak, his loving wife and highly esteemed former SAWA-Australia (SA) Treasurer. We are all deeply appreciative of Matthias' gifts of leadership and inspiration and for leaving a strong organisation to continue the work.

Christine also provided a summary of the VTC Director's Annual Report (see pages 1-2), and stressed the ongoing political turmoil and injustice experienced by women in Afghanistan ...

..... The situation for women in Afghanistan is just as dire as ever in the 40 years of war it is experiencing. The Global Peace Index has again put Afghanistan as the most unsafe place in the world to live, displacing Syria

to second most dangerous. Civilian deaths have hit a record high. Serious, violent crimes against women still go unpunished while traditional mediation practices are used which deprives women of access to justice and hinders the realisation of their fundamental rights, despite long standing legal mechanisms. (from VTC Report)

Other details from the Secretary's 2019 Report

.... It has always been the aim of SAWA to not only assist women to learn skills, but also to free themselves from the shackles of Afghan traditional society and gain their legitimate role in society. We are pleased to see that these aims are turning into reality through the joint efforts of SAWA and ACTED. ACTED is a large French humanitarian NGO: Agency for Technical Cooperation and Developement (Agence d'Aide a la Cooperation Technique Et au Developement) which awarded a grant to the VTC. New activities can now be added to its programs; food processing, beautician training and a child care centre for women studying at the VTC.

Sending the funds through Afghanistan each year has often proven to be a challenge and various channels have been used or changed when Afghanistan changes its rules. This year for an unknown reason, the bank that SAWA uses in Kabul was unable to process receipt of the money. Matthias quietly worked on this for months to resolve it, eventually reaching agreement with the Director of AFCECO for funds to be paid into their account and then forwarded to the VTC – to the relief of all.

2019 saw the cessation of the student scholarship program due to the lack of student/sponsor communication through AFCECO. The communication with OPAWC has always been excellent so it was decided to have a VTC teacher's scholarship but this did not get off the ground when it was decided that it may seem discriminatory if not all teachers receive dedicated funding.

Fundraising activities during 2019

There were multiple screenings of 'The Judge', a documentary about the first woman ever appointed as a judge to a Shari'a court in the Palestinian Territories.

This was offered to SAWA as a fundraising tool by the team who produced the movie, 'Frame By Frame'. It was shown initially in Adelaide in July 2018, then in Hobart in September 2018 supported by a community grant and sponsored by the Hobart City Council. The Lord Mayor of Hobart, an Alderman of the Council and a Member of Tasmania's Parliament. The film has also been shown in St Oswald's Anglican Church, Parkside in Kerang, Victoria and St Margaret's Anglican Church Hall, Eltham, Victoria, as well as another viewing in Tasmania.

A successful collaboration occurred with local music students in South Australia. WILPF Liaison committee member, Ruth Russell, is a mature-age violin student with well-known teacher, Jill Folauhola. Every year, every student (ranging in ages from 5 – 75) performs in Jill's concert as preparation for public recitals later on. In 2019, SAWA was chosen as one of the two charities to pass donations onto. Those attending not only enjoyed a delightful concert but also afternoon tea and a chance to learn more about SAWA. \$560 was raised for SAWA.

Sincere thanks were extended to all involved in delivering these successful events.

Christine Gamble concluded her Report by extending special thanks to Christine and Sebastian Tomczak – and thanking all SAWA Committee members and supporters:

Our special thanks go to Christine Tomczak, our outgoing committee member, who was also our Treasurer for seven years. Chris was committed, shoulder to shoulder, with Matthias. Her work and dedication to making a difference in the lives of Afghan women, is greatly appreciated by SAWA and the women of the Vocational Training Centre.

The SAWA-Australia (SA) Committee also appreciates the assistance of Sebastian Tomczak, son of Matthias, who helped enormously regarding technical matters.

Thanks to all the SAWA-Australia (SA) Committee who stepped up to keep SAWA afloat without our captain and engine. We realise just how many roles Matthias had and we are still working to fill these roles.

Special thanks to SAWA-Australia (NSW) who produced the SAWAN to keep our members informed. Of course, thanks and gratitude to all members of SAWA-Australia (SA) for your committed support.

Letter from Christine Tomczak

Christine Tomczak retired from the Committee at the AGM. She sent the following message to Christine Gamble, SAWA Secretary:

" I would like to thank you for your secretary's report and the warm words you had for Matthias' work. His efforts did not go unnoticed and will encourage all of us not to abandon the brave women in Afghanistan. I thank you for your warm words that will encourage all of us to persevere. I am grateful to you and the SAWA team who picked up the pieces to carry them as far as we needed, in order to spread the message of hope!"

Other News / Upcoming Activities:

- **The 4th Ghan International Film Festival** was held recently in Adelaide. SAWA distributed brochures during this event.
- David Corkhill, partner of member Gillian Hunter, has generously agreed to take on responsibility for the database and website. Thank you David!
- Helen Shaw, a Brisbane member, is keen to organise a SAWA event in Queensland. All Qld supporters have been contacted.
- SAWA is re-establishing contact with Zonta with the assistance of Julie Irwin. Zonta is keen to work on special projects, and SAWA has asked the VTC Director to nominate a project.
- **Banyule U3A** (Melbourne) is showing 'The Judge' on Monday 27 April at 2pm as a fundraiser for SAWA. Email: mariaaxco37@gmail.com

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Members and friends at the Annual General Meeting at Rumi Palace on 19 November 2019



SAWA-Australia (NSW) PO Box 1741, Rozelle NSW 2039 website: nsw.sawa-australia.org
Bendigo Bank Rozelle Branch BSB 633-000 Account number 141397471 (SAWA-Australia NSW)
Convenor: Shirley Allen **Assistant Convenor:** Margaret Hetherington **Secretary:** Carolyn Allen
Treasurer: Margaret Bailey **Committee:** Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsmann, Jenny Matkevich,
Joan Long, Denise Fahey, Robyn Longhurst. **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete.
www.nsw.sawa-australia.org; Facebook *Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan SAWA -NSW.*

SUPPORTING AFGHAN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP.

A founding principle of SAWA has always been to support projects led by Afghan residents. At its founding stage SAWA was aware that too many mistakes have been made by well-meaning people in developed countries assuming their knowledge and skills were sufficient to lead projects in foreign countries with high needs. Hence our commitment to local leadership.

Currently the whole of SAWA's efforts are channelled through OPAWC (Organization of Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities). Founded in 2003, the dual focus of the women who lead OPAWC has been on both an immediate contribution to women's lives and at the same time "building a framework for long term, sustainable opportunities for women to escape the vicious cycle of dependence and victimization in a male dominated and fundamentalist social structure".

They focused on working simultaneously on three fronts: literacy, practical wage-earning skills and health. They believe that "if a significant number of women could have access to these basic human rights, they could have a foothold on the journey to achieve their constitutional right of equality and even address areas of redress yet to be written into law".

In relation to literacy OPAWC now funds hundreds of literacy classes across the country. SAWA NSW's project in Nangarhar Province, described in the last SAWAN. is one of them. Our project is housed in the backrooms of a house in accordance with OPAWC's policy of using any inconspicuous location "wherever women could meet, safe from the forces that would stop their pursuit of knowledge".

In relation to income-generating projects OPAWC's projects include poultry farms, tailoring, carpet weaving and handicrafts programs, The SAWA NSW project focuses on tailoring and it has been successful in helping women to earn. It fits with OPAWC's aim to fund projects which do not require a high level of education and training but which immediately allow women to earn money. In relation to health projects, OPAWC has taken responsibility for the Hamoon Clinic in Farah which also promotes mobile health teams to take care to remote areas.

Always in courses OPAWC encourages women "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." (Source: OPAWC Website)

MEETING WITH LOCAL AFGHAN WOMEN

One of the aims of SAWA-NSW's strategic plan is to consult with local Afghan women to better understand the situation of women in Afghanistan.

In November 2019 some of the SAWA-NSW committee met with Malia who runs Bamiyan restaurants in Sydney and Canberra with her husband, Haseeb Miazad, and a friend, Shaista Zohal who works with Westpac Bank. Both women left Afghanistan some years ago but have frequent contact with friends and family there. Malia attended a school for refugees in Pakistan and



Malia speaking at our recent lunch at Bamiyan Restaurant

Shaista also did her initial schooling in Pakistan.

They both agreed that education is the key to a better future for women in Afghanistan and explained to us how many traditional ways can make this difficult. Early marriage is still common and young women may also be called on to help look after younger children in the family. Some men are reluctant to support their daughters' education and in some areas it is dangerous for girls to attend school. They emphasised that despite frequent bombings and ongoing violence, everyday life continues for many.

The education centre funded by SAWA - NSW teaches English, computer skills, tailoring and basic literacy. Malia said that skills in traditional embroidery would also be very useful as there is an overseas market for this.

RECENT EVENTS

- **Street Stall: 7th December** again outside Woolies proceeds included \$150 for bags. Baked goods & potted succulents sold well. \$70.70 was donated for Birthing Kits. Overall \$910 was raised which was better than previous stalls.

COMING EVENTS

- **Stall Saturday February 1** 9.00 am to 1.00pm outside Woolworths to raise the \$3,000 needed for birthing kits this year.
- **Birthing Kit Assembly Morning Monday March 2** at the usual location, Leichhardt Rowing Club, 175. Glover Street, Leichhardt, 9.30 for 10.00am to 12.30 pm. Again, we are most grateful to the Rowing Club for donating the venue.

LATER EVENTS

At this stage the Committee has not finalised dates for fundraising events this year. However, the following activities are planned and details will appear later

1. Dinner and silent auction – mid year
2. Annual Lunch – November
3. Canberra SAWA dinner
4. Film night