



Letter from Afghanistan

Dear Friends,

February 2017

Greetings to all from Kabul, Afghanistan. As the Capacitar Afghanistan team—Pat Cane and George Horan—we are here again collaborating with Dr. Hakim Young and the Afghan Peace Volunteers (APV). During our twelve days in Kabul we are facilitating wellness workshops for high school and university youth, for street children attending the APV school, and for the APV women’s sewing cooperative. Along with the workshops, we also offer individual counseling sessions to many of the youth who are dealing with ongoing stress and trauma.

This is our third time in Afghanistan, and with each visit we continue to be inspired by the young APV men and women who are working to improve their lives and to live as persons committed to peace and nonviolence in a country deeply impacted by decades of war and violence. On our first day in Kabul, Hakim reported recent UN statistics showing the number of casualties of the ongoing war. In the first half of 2016, 5,166 civilians were killed or wounded, with over one-third of the casualties being children. This is the highest number of children killed or wounded since the counting began in 2009. Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) said: “Every single casualty documented in the UN report – people killed while praying, working, studying, fetching water, recovering in hospitals –represents a failure of commitment and should be a call to action for parties to the conflict to take meaningful, concrete steps to reduce civilians’ suffering and increase protection.

... The protracted conflict has meant that access to education and health-care, to livelihood and shelter, to the freedom of movement and to a whole host of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights has been severely curtailed for millions of Afghans for far too long.”

As we met with the young Afghan men and women (ages 16 to 25) in workshops and counseling sessions, we got a deeper understanding of the challenges these youth are facing. Besides the stress of studying and preparing for school exams to qualify



Pat Cane and George Horan with the APV youth in Kabul



Pat Cane, Naser Lessani, Hakim Young and George Horan



Capacitar acupressure points to relieve stress



Capacitar fingerholds to manage emotions



George leading the youth in Pal Dan Gum exercises

for universities (Concord and TOEFL exams), the youth also daily deal with poverty, family problems and the threat of ongoing violence in the streets of Kabul. Some of the youth in the workshops have witnessed suicide bombings and have been traumatized by these memories. A bomb went off last year in front of the family shop of one young man who reported that he felt hopeless and had difficulty focusing his attention during his study for exams. Several students were at the American University last August when a car bomb exploded and militants overran the campus. Many students were injured in the crossfire or from jumping out of buildings to escape. Thirteen persons died in the attack, including students, a professor and security personnel. One young counselee who was separated during the attack from his close friend who died, now has survivor's guilt. Several students shared how they felt hopeless and depressed after losing their friends in the university attack and experienced the destruction of all that had given them life and hope.

It was encouraging to watch the impact of the Capacitar trauma healing methods on the youth. As we taught the different practices, we could visibly see changes in their faces and bodies as the youth relaxed and connected with their inner wisdom and safe space. The Afghan youth are usually so open and desirous of changing that it takes very little to initiate the healing process. Often in places where people have many resources and there is over choice, like in the US or Europe, there can be resistance to healing or it takes a lot longer for people to open to the process. Where there are few resources and people are dealing with ongoing violence, they usually want to heal and get on with life in the midst of the challenges they face.

One of the values we are trying to teach in the workshops is healthy self-care. In a society and culture where all people have known for decades is war and ongoing insecurity, there is no understanding of self-care, only survival. Some of the youth also have the challenge of lack of understanding from their families. Most of the youth we worked with were born during the time when the Taliban had control of the country (1996-2001) imposing a sharia system of behavior administered by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. Women were required to wear the head-to-toe burqa, and education and health care were not available to them. Music and television were banned. Men whose beards were deemed too short were jailed. And punishments were severe for everyone.



As a result of this recent history, some of the youth are under pressure from their families to succeed in school, since the parents were not able to receive an education themselves. Some also struggle with the control exerted by their parents over their life choices and personal development. And some of the youth must drop out of school to help support their families. In Afghanistan, the second poorest country in Asia, 36% of the population lives below the poverty line. With a very high unemployment rate (40% in 2015),

many youth feel hopeless with no future. Even with a university degree, it is often very difficult to find suitable employment. A report and recommendation from The Borgen Project states, "Poverty reduction programs in Afghanistan can begin by focusing on improving the education of all Afghans while also closing the gender gap that is seen in school enrollment. In order for more Afghans to be lifted out of poverty, they must have improved access to education. With better education, Afghans will have better opportunities to earn a higher income and lift themselves out of poverty."

The Capacitar trauma healing practices are of great value to the young men and women of APV to help them manage their stress and heal traumatic memories so they can better study and achieve their educational goals. Capacitar is committed to continue walking in solidarity with the Afghan Peace Volunteers and the people of Afghanistan.

With peace and blessings,
Pat Cane, Capacitar Founder Director
George Horan, Capacitar Afghanistan Team



George and Hakim teaching Capacitar fingerholds



Pat counseling a young man



Youth practicing acupressure and self-care