

Najiba is a graduate of one of the primary schools that are supported by Save the Children for Afghan children in the Balochistan refugee villages of southwest Pakistan. She has recently started working as a teacher after completing Save the Children's five-week pre-service teacher training.

**So far, 27 Afghan refugee girls have become teachers after finishing their primary school education in Save the Children schools.**

**They do this by completing both primary school and the teacher training course. Then they teach younger students in the morning and continue their own education in the afternoon.**



Now, Najiba teaches grades one and two (math, Pashto language and Islamic studies) in the morning and is enrolled in grade seven in the afternoon.

Najiba is 15 years old and was born in Kabul. She graduated from school #14 in New Saranan refugee village, which is about 45 minutes drive from Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan Province in Pakistan. In a conversation with a Save the Children staff member, Najiba said that one of the problems girls face in a community like hers is that "many of the parents, especially fathers, are uneducated and, therefore, they don't send their daughters to schools". But, her father studied up to grade 12 and her mother can read and write, so there is a tradition of education in her family, and her parents said that she should attend school, like her two siblings. Najiba also said that she thinks it is "very important for [her] generation of Afghans, both boys and girls, to get educated so that they can then help the generations of younger Afghans get educated so that they all can help in rebuilding Afghanistan".

"It is very easy for the boys to go to school because in a culture like [ours]," Najiba said, "boys are like free birds who can go anywhere and are allowed to do whatever they want to do." She then said that girls and boys should be treated the same way because "freedom (to get education) is for everyone".

Continuing on, Najiba said, "I like to learn and want to serve my country as doctors and engineers do". She said that she "wanted to meet new people and wanted to share my happiness with them. In my country, most people are uneducated, and I want them to get educated."

Clearly, Najiba has a plan for her future. She hopes that not only will she be able to finish the highest grade in the refugee village school (grade 12) but would also be able to go on to higher education. "I want to get as much as education as possible," she said.

She said the fact that she is a primary school graduate and can read and write has made her important in the eyes of her relatives. She said that her relatives are “always asking her for help. I feel very proud because I can read and write not only for myself but also for others.”

Najiba said that the fact that she is now working as a teacher while also studying will benefit her future. “I will learn more, as it is the beginning [of my education], and I will get the sweet reward in the future. I am going to serve the children of my country. Today I have become a teacher. Tomorrow my students will become teachers.”

When asked why she had become teacher, Najiba laughed shyly and said, “I had wanted to become a doctor or an engineer. But, since I am still in grade 7, I cannot do that.” She then said that when she learned about the extraordinary opportunity to teach young children immediately, she decided to be a teacher. She said that she will use her income to supplement the income of her family. But she will “also spend some money on [my] education”.

Najiba said she “learned many new and important things by participating in the teacher training program”. She said she has recognized what important role Parent-Teacher Associations play in schools, and what is the responsibility of the Head Teacher. But most importantly, she learned about the new teaching methods like how to answer students’ questions, how to lead group work and individual work, how to lecture, and how to help students with practical work. In Najiba’s opinion, “questions and answers are the most important method because it helps evaluate the learning of the students”.

Najiba said she hopes to return to Afghanistan one day, when things are more safe and secure.

## **Background**

The Save the Children’s (SC/US) Afghan Refugee Program provides assistance to Afghan refugees living in refugee villages in Balochistan. SC/US began assistance to Afghans in the Balochistan refugee villages in the mid-1980s. A large number of Afghans repatriated in 1992, but many others stayed in Pakistan. In 1995, UNHCR approached SC/US to serve as its main implementing partner for education in Balochistan’s refugee villages. Since then, the SC/US refugee village education program has expanded the number of primary schools, increased enrolment and, in 1997, initiated home-based primary schools for girls, who are not permitted to go to school outside their homes. Since 1998, SC/US has emphasized increasing girls’ access to education and improving children’s learning and development opportunities through the development of teacher training, learning assessment, resource rooms, box libraries, playgrounds, and a School Health and Nutrition Initiative (SHNI). These accomplishments have been made possible with support from the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration (BPRM), among others.

The majority of adult teachers working with SC/US in Balochistan refugee village schools have had limited or no professional training, and few of them have all the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to be fully effective teachers. SC/US struggles to recruit new teachers, especially female teachers. Much of the refugee population is from rural areas in Afghanistan, where education is either unheard of or not available for women. Also, likely candidates for teaching positions often find more lucrative jobs in less challenging settings. All of these factors combined encouraged SC/US to develop the training program in which Najiba and 26 other young girls, so far, have participated. Clearly, this innovative program is a source of new teachers, and one Save the Children hopes will encourage them to remain in the teaching profession when they return to Afghanistan.