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Orphaned Afghan boys receive donated school supplies from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

KABUL - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers paid a visit to some displaced Afghan boys and provided them with much needed school supplies, toys and treats during “operation backpack drop,” May 7.

The children, ages five to 18, are all considered orphans due to the fact that their parents are either deceased or disabled thus leaving them in the care of relatives.

Each of the 160 students that attend the all-boys Ostad Khalil Ullah Khalili Orphans Education Center located in Kabul received a new backpack filled with pens, paper, pencils, notebooks, crayons, erasers, rulers, sharpeners, toys, a puzzle and candy delivered by members of the Afghanistan Engineer District-North

The humanitarian effort was made possible with state side cash donations from a church in Kentucky, and employees from the AED-N Qalaa House totaling \$1,600 and donations of toys, books, puzzles and school supplies.

Many of the donations came from AED-N member’s home districts, like Sharon Schwab from Waynesville, Ohio who is a senior electrical engineer technician over special projects here with the Quality Assurance Branch and deployed from the Huntington, W. Va District Corps of Engineers.

“I sent out emails and posted on *Facebook* that we were looking for puzzle donations,” said Schwab.

The result was a puzzle drive from her home district that yielded more than 80 puzzles. Additionally, Schwab’s family and friends also donated puzzles bringing the total number of puzzles to more than 160, enough for each student to receive their own.



One hundred and sixty boys ranging in ages five to 18 from the Ostad Khalil Ullah Khalili Orphans Education Center located in Kabul line up to receive new backpacks filled with school supplies, a puzzle, toys and candy during Afghanistan Engineer District-North’s Operation Backpack.

“Puzzles help the kids learn the design and construction aspect of engineering,” Schwab says. “Just like a drawing or diagram for building plans, puzzles also have a picture on the box and pieces that they have to put together which gives the students the beginning basis of building something from a picture.”

In fact, there were so many supplies and toys donated that it took nearly 20 AED-N Qalaa House members to sort through all the donations, blow up basketballs and soccer balls and pack 160 backpacks.



Students from the Ostad Khalil Ullah Khalili Orphans Education Center in Kabul show off their new backpacks filled with school supplies as well as their gratitude to the Afghanistan Engineer District- North for hand delivering the bags to the Afghan government run school that strictly caters to orphaned boys. (photo by LaDonna Davis)

The Ostad Khalil Ullah Khalili Orphans Education Center was built in 2009 and is funded by the Afghan government. The students take classes in science, computers, reading and arithmetic. But, according to the orphan education center Director, Naqib Jami, finding qualified teachers in Afghanistan is very difficult. “Our teachers only make about [the equivalent] \$80 American in salary,” said Jami. “So, it is very hard to find people that have the skills to teach science courses for so little money.”

Though the school receives a certain amount of supplies at the beginning of the year, the supplies that AED-N provided will help the school’s dollars go even further, possibly making it easier to pay for good teachers. “School supplies are very expensive in the markets,” he says. “Anytime something is done for the kids it is welcome. We are very happy the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is here to help; we are very appreciative.”

Once the volunteers from AED-N arrived at the school, the excitement from the boys and faculty could hardly be contained. Many students offered the only English they knew, “thank you,” while others gladly posed for pictures and shook hands with the volunteers who placed a bag on their back.

“I love the blank notebook for drawing and the color crayons, said Safha Hayty, 13 through a translator. “I am very happy with everything we got, it is very useful and we are glad to receive them.”

For the AED-N members who participated in the backpack drop, the real reward was the sense of pride and satisfaction that giving much needed supplies to the students and staff provided. Even more special was the operation took place right around Mother’s Day, making it a fitting tribute to the volunteers who spent the American Holiday with Afghan children who no longer have parents.

“Seeing the kids faces light up when we gave them the backpack was a true blessing,” said John Du Bois, a contract specialist here from Paulsboro, N.J. and deployed from Lakeland Air Force Base, Texas. “We should all be very thankful for the things we so often take for granted.”

Added Schwab, “right now I work in long term gratification with some of my projects that won’t be finished for a while. But giving the backpacks to the kids is instant gratification because you get to see the joy on their faces when they receive it.”

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Members of the Afghanistan Engineer District-North gather around students from the Ostad Khalil Ullah Khalili Orphans Education Center after dropping off donated school supplies and toys to the orphaned Afghan boys. (photo by LaDonna Davis)