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Fearless: Maihan Wali

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Fearless: Maihan Wali

Abstract

Maihan Wali describes herself as “one of those kids that always wanted to help.”

So when she noticed that many of her peers in her class struggled with reading and writing, she started a peer to peer literacy program with the help of her sister and a few friends. She was only 8 years old. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, peer literacy program, Afghan Women Network (AWN)

Disciplines

Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Disability and Equity in Education | Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

FEARLESS: MAIHAN WALI

February 6, 2015



Maihan Wali describes herself as “one of those kids that always wanted to help.”

So when she noticed that many of her peers in her class struggled with reading and writing, she started a peer to peer literacy program with the help of her sister and a few friends. She was only 8 years old.

“I wanted to do something to help my classmates,” she said as she remembers seeing the frustration and ultimately embarrassment that a classmate faced when asked to stand in front of the class and answer a question. Two years later, her school found out about their peer to peer literacy program and how successful it was in improving the students’ reading and writing skills while boosting their confidence in class. They decided to adopt it and make a permanent fixture of the school curriculum.

One day, as she watched TV she noticed that all the athletes on the screen were male. A new idea began to form in her head. The next day, she gathered a group of her friends and pitched the idea of starting a sports program at their school. They were all hesitant, she said. Born and raised in Afghanistan, she understood her friends’ concerns, citing that women and young girls still face opposition. She managed to convince her friends to at least talk to the principal about the possibility of starting the program. Maihan remembers her principal listening to her and her friends very intently. After they finished, she calmly told them that the Minister of Education would not allow the program in their school.

“What if we just hide it and don’t tell them about it?”

She allowed them to start the program as long as they promised to be discrete.

Years later, Maihan learned that her principal had put her career at risk when she gave them the permission to start a sports program.

She was ten years old.

Knowledge of the activities of Maihan and her friends reached the Afghan Women Network (AWN). They were invited to attend a two day workshop that focused on issues of women's rights and empowerment. On the last day, she and her sister were called into the Director's office and offered a job as Youth Committee leader for Afghan youth.

"But I'm too young," was her first thought.

With the director's encouragement and her parents' support, Maihan accepted her new position and used her age to her advantage.

Her first idea of starting free computer and English classes for the youth in the communities was implemented within a few months. She then worked with the organization to start sports programs at other schools around her city.

Her involvement with the Afghan Women Network took her beyond the borders of Afghanistan. At age 12, she traveled to Jordan to participate in the Peace through Sports program on behalf of the Olympic Committee of Afghanistan. In 2008, she was chosen to attend the British Council's Global Changemaker conference, becoming the first girl in Afghanistan to earn the title of Global Change maker by the British Council. Over the years, Maihan has had the chance to travel to many other countries to attend workshops and conferences that focus on women's issues and empowerment, and has even been invited as a panelist and facilitator at some.

Maihan continues her work with the Afghan Women Network even after she moved to the US for high school. At Hotchkiss, she started a club that raised money to support her Women's Empowerment through Sports program in Afghanistan.

At Gettysburg, she continues to mix her passion for women's empowerment and sports. She recently submitted her application for the Davis Project for Peace grant through the Center for Public Service to expand her Women's Empowerment through Sports program beyond her city. She currently plays in the intramural basketball and soccer teams, and also plans to try out for the women's basketball team next year. She is excited to get more involved and share her experiences with her peers. She hopes to bring more attention to women's right issues on campus and debunk stereotypes and myths that others may have about her home country of Afghanistan.