



REAL PEOPLE | REAL STORIES

MALALAI, AFGHANISTAN

Realizing a Dream Helps to Feed Her Family

When CARE opened the first-ever girls' school in Mali Khail, Afghanistan, it kindled the dreams of Malalai, a 13-year-old girl who had given up dreaming of her future. "For the first time, a window of brightness and hope was opened for our village girls," Malalai says. "All girls in our community started going to school."

All the girls except Malalai. A bomb blast had recently killed Malalai's father. While her friends enrolled in school as soon as it opened, Malalai was forced to stay home, apprenticed to her seamstress mother. Malalai's mother knew her daughter wanted to go to school, but she was afraid to let her go. Without Malalai's help, she feared she would not earn enough to feed herself and her four children.

Malalai respected her mother's wishes, but she refused to give up. She fundamentally understood that her education could benefit the entire family. "My mother had problems with writing the sizes of customers' clothes. She asked literate people in the village to help her, but often couldn't find anyone. I convinced her that, if I could go to school, I would learn to help her to write clothes sizes correctly."

With that promise, Malalai's mother let her attend school. The results were almost immediate. Malalai quickly learned

to read, write and solve math problems. She now helps her mother's business by writing down order sizes and by doing the family bookkeeping. Malalai learned more, and her family now earns more.

Malalai's mother was so impressed with how her daughter's education improved their lives, she's trying to share that success. She has become a local activist for girls' education – encouraging families in the village to send their girls to school and discouraging the forced early marriage of their daughters so these young women can stay in school longer.

Rescued by education from life as an illiterate seamstress's apprentice, Malalai plans to share her good fortune with her family and community. "I want to be a teacher, to serve my community and support my family economically. I proudly say I am one of the most talented students in my class. It's because of CARE that I am what I am."

CARE supports 300 schools in Afghanistan educating 22,295 students, two-thirds of them girls. CARE trains teachers and staff in the communities where they live to ensure that the long-term existence of these schools doesn't depend on CARE's presence.

When Malalai's mother saw how educating her daughter helped her entire family, she began urging her fellow villagers to send their daughters to school, too.



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