journey of HOPE

An in-depth report by Karin Ronnow and photographer Deirdre Eitel documenting the work of Greg Mortenson and his non-profit Central Asia Institute.
A Kyrgyz woman in the Pamir mountains prepares for the morning milking of her clan’s yaks. Dairy is an important component of the Kyrgyz diet.

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This publication is dedicated to the memory of photographer Deirdre Eitel, who died unexpectedly on Oct. 31, 2008. Her remarkable work fills these pages.

Deirdre made three trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan in the last year of her life. She believed in what CAI was doing, in the critical importance of it. She saw how CAI’s schools changed lives and inspired hope in places where hope has long been in short supply. And she wanted to show the world.

So, camera in hand, Deirdre climbed mountains, kneeled in the dusty dirt and stood on rooftops — whatever she had to do to capture the images that tell the story of CAI’s work. Quietly, professionally and sensitively, she documented a remote, often misunderstood land where few Westerners, unfortunately, dare to tread.

Her adventurous spirit and capacity for nonjudgmental love and compassion were inspirational.

When Deirdre and I traveled as a team overseas, she inevitably saw things I didn’t see and heard things I didn’t hear. Her eye on the world made me a better reporter. She always helped me tell a better story. And she made every journey richer, deeper and more meaningful simply by being there with me. Her contribution to CAI’s work has been immeasurable. Her death leaves a hole in all our hearts.

— Karin Ronnow
Nov. 4, 2008
Just as this second volume of “Journey of Hope” was going to press in late October, a magnitude 6.4 earthquake shook the southwest corner of Pakistan, killing hundreds of people.

E-mails and phone calls to Central Asia Institute’s offices in Bozeman, Mont., started almost immediately, as supporters called to inquire whether any of CAI’s schools had been damaged. They had not. CAI’s schools are all farther north, in other regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Yet the quake was a reminder of the magnitude 7.6 earthquake that rocked northern Pakistan and Kashmir in October 2005. Today, long after most other international aid groups have moved on, CAI is helping Kashmir communities rebuild their schools and investing in the continuing education of some of the area’s brightest female students.

And that’s just a portion of the work that has made 2008 such a successful — and hectic — year for CAI.

The resounding success of “Three Cups of Tea,” the story of CAI’s founder Greg Mortenson, has helped drive the organization’s growth. Yet it is also Mortenson’s refreshing willingness to talk about things like hope, love and compassion in a nonsectarian way that appeals to people who are hungry for peace and nonviolent solutions to complex international problems.

“We have no political, religious, ideological or Western agenda,” Mortenson said, speculating on what draws people to CAI. “We just try to help the people with what they want and empower them to help create their own solutions.”

If you think that sounds awfully humble for a guy who’s book has been No. 1 on the New York Times bestseller list for 22 months, well, that’s just the kind of guy he is. Really.

“We’re just ordinary people,” Mortenson says of himself and his staff. “We make mistakes, we sometimes fail, and we are human. But we work very hard. And we never give up.”

It is not easy work. The hurdles are significant. In addition to natural disasters, Pakistan and Afghanistan are mired in war, political upheaval and desperate poverty. Religious extremists oppose education because it undermines the ignorance they feed on. It’s an uphill slog to get education jump-started in many of these regions.

But that reality only inspires the CAI team. They know education won’t solve all the problems — but it is an important start.

Ultimately, most Pakistanis and Afghans want peace. They want working democracy. They want more and better-paying jobs, good roads, clean drinking water and food to eat. They are fed up with violence and they want to get on with living their lives.

And they know a better future for their children starts with education.

— Karin Ronnow
Abida Ghaffar, 19, left, and Farhat Hussain, 13, make a list of books they would like in the new Gundi Piran library in July 2008. The library is the first for the Neelum Valley, and will serve the community and beyond.

Keeping hope alive

CAI’s educational efforts in Pakistan stretch from Kashmir to Afghan border

PATIKA, AZAD-KASHMIR, PAKISTAN — The big green truck carrying a much-anticipated load of cargo rumbles slowly over the plank suspension bridge and into this village on the banks of the Neelum River.

Lettering on the side of the truck identifies it as belonging to the “Bombay Transport Company.” Otherwise it is nondescript, just another truck.

But it is carrying a precious load: 154 boxes of brand-new books, bound for a new library at Gundi Piran Girls’ High School, the first significant attempt to establish a school library in this remote valley.

The truck bounces over the bridge and onto a dirt road, through the market, busy with morning shoppers. Shopkeepers turn and watch the truck go by. Men squatting beside the road, picking at their teeth with toothpicks, gaze with half-hearted interest.

When the truck pulls up to the school gate, three guys climb out, stretch and then start hauling the heavy boxes into the school.

The new library, a single room in a building shared with a new computer lab, was built by Central Asia Institute in 2008. The floor-to-ceiling bookshelves will soon be filled with everything from children’s books to Urdu-English dictionaries, science and math teaching manuals, child development texts and encyclopedias.

“CAI helped with the resources, with funding and planning, but this will be run by the teachers,” said Genevieve Chabot, CAI’s international program manager.

“Kori doad gav pashminas ather.”
— Kashmiri proverb
(translation: Inherent anxiety for a daughter’s welfare affects a person like moths quietly eating into precious pashmina.)
But that doesn’t mean the books are just for teachers and students in the preschool through 10th-grade classes at Gundi Piran.

“People from other schools, students and teachers, can come and borrow books,” Chabot said. “And we hope to set up satellite libraries at other schools in the valley.”

Gundi Piran is what’s known as a government school in these parts. The government pays the teachers, supplies the textbooks and built the original two-story structure that was destroyed in the massive 2005 earthquake that devastated Kashmir.

CAI rebuilt the school in 2007, one of 17 it has reconstructed post-quake in Azad Kashmir.

“Our five-year goal was just to get the kids into schools after the earthquake, it was crisis intervention,” Chabot said. The problem is that often, “the government’s left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing,” and CAI keeps uncovering enormous holes in the education system.

Building a library was an attempt to fill one of those holes while still remaining on the “infrastructure” side of the equation. But libraries also reinforce the message that learning to read is valuable, that ideas, self expression and knowledge have great worth.

Those are key elements in CAI’s fundamental mission of fighting ignorance.

“If you can’t read, then you must believe what the imam tells you,” said Shaukat Ali, a former Kashmiri freedom fighter and Taliban member who now teaches at the Gundi Piran school. “If you are only a listener, not a reader, if you cannot read the language, you can get the wrong idea. And that is a misfortune.”

“But slowly, slowly, we can encourage modern education, encourage the people to send boys and girls to school. If we invest, it will come back to us. We have to deal with problems of tradition and culture. But we can stop extremism. If people are educated, we can fight against poverty, cruelty and injustice,” he said.

Guns and money

Extremism is not new in this part of the world, but Pakistanis are finding that the frontlines of the “war on terror” are rapidly shifting into their backyard.

The country’s “Wild West,” the tribal belt bordering Afghanistan, has become a haven for militants hiding out in the caves and deep mountain ravines. Armed Taliban and al-Qaida leaders roam the area, training soldiers and launching attacks against the U.S. and coalition troops across the border in Afghanistan.

Pakistan never had much control over the 10,425-square-mile area, but it’s also never been quite so obvious.

Over the past 18 months or so, the militants have increasingly focused on targets inside Pakistan itself, a place where suicide bombings had been relatively unheard of until recently.

If any single event started the escalating violence it was the armed standoff between extremists and the government at the Red Mosque in Islamabad in July 2007. The eventual storming of the mosque and death of students inside exacerbated the militants’ rage and left the political leaders who ordered it vulnerable.

Within months, President and Army Chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf had declared a state of emergency. Then he quit his military post. He conceded to the return of exiled former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif to participate in upcoming elections.

Within just a couple months of her return to Pakistan, Bhutto was assassinated. Elections were postponed until February but eventually won by candidates in Bhutto’s Pakistan People’s Party and Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-N, who created a coalition government. A threatened impeachment forced Musharraf to resign. Bhutto’s widower was elected president.

It has been a wild ride. And amidst the political upheaval, the militants were gaining ground. They are blamed for Bhutto’s assassination on Dec. 27, 2007, and the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in downtown Islamabad, Pakistan’s capital city, on Sept. 20, 2008, among other crimes.
It became glaringly obvious that the tribal areas had become the militants' hub. U.S. and coalition forces accused the new government of foot-dragging and started pushing for greater latitude to move the war into tribal areas. Pakistan resisted. But in late 2008, the U.S. went ahead with missile strikes inside Pakistan anyway.

The Afghan government is frustrated, too, and routinely accuses Pakistan's military and intelligence service of fostering terrorism and extremism.

Even residents of the tribal areas, some of whom once praised the militants, have become increasingly frustrated. The largely illiterate people in those areas are proud but poor. Rather than lifting them out of that grim reality, however, the militants have only made things worse. Taliban leaders impose strict rules, torch girls' schools, kill anyone who opposes them and commit all sorts of other crimes. And now, they have brought the war to these people's homes.

In some places, tribesmen are taking matters into their own hands, forming their own posses, called "lashkars," to run the Taliban out of town. But in so doing, they become targets themselves.

It's a mess.

Further complicating matters is Pakistan's economy, hard hit by rising food prices, an energy shortage and inflation exceeding 35 percent. The situation reached crisis proportions in the fall, when it became clear Pakistan would need billions of dollars in emergency assistance to avoid defaulting on debt payments due in December.

After a host of countries — the United States, China, Saudi Arabia — refused to help, the government had to turn to the International Monetary Fund for help.

Northern Areas

Many of today's realities were not realities when Greg Mortenson, founder and director of CAI, started working in these countries in 1993. In fact, the remote Northern Areas, where CAI projects began, only makes international news when someone dies trying to summit K2, or when there are Sunni-Shia clashes.

Yet nearly 1 million people live in the 28,000-square-mile area, 90 percent of them in 979 rural villages "scattered over a vast area of exceptionally mountainous terrain" at the intersection of the world's highest mountain ranges – the Karakoram, Himalaya and Hindu Kush, according to the World Bank. It's a vast, isolated and harsh region.

The Northern Areas is administered by Pakistan, but remains a "disputed" territory over which Pakistan and India have waged numerous wars since partition in 1947. That means there is a significant military presence in the region, but little investment in the people. "The area remains one of the most economically and socially disadvantaged in the country, with a per capita income of some 60 percent that of Pakistan as a whole," according to the World Bank.

This is where Mortenson built his first school in 1996. Since then, CAI has built about 50 schools here, including three constructed under the watchful eye of CAI staffer Muhammad Nazir in 2008:

- **MYURDO SCHOOL**: A primary school for about 200 students, with an emphasis on girls, on the Line of Control, near the hub of the India-Pakistan war in 1999;

- **DAHONEY SCHOOL**: A girls' primary school in the Khaplu Valley, spearheaded by Muhammad Ghulam, a "legendary K2 porter famous for carrying triple loads, over 132 pounds, up the rugged Baltoro Glacier time and time again," Mortenson said. "Only a handful of porters can do that. He is very committed to the community, always volunteering to organize water projects, women's vocational training, helping out the poor, even though he is one of the poorest men in the village."

Where the mountains open up, the Indus River becomes braided, depositing glacial silt in the valley bottom. The river and its tributaries are the lifeblood of the arid Northern Areas. Photo looking northwest from Skardu, Baltistan.
Ben School: A primary school for about 200 students in a valley so remote that there is no road, “and we had to use a cable car to get materials and supplies in,” Mortenson said.

CAI had been conducting classes in these three villages in shelters, rented rooms or tents for several years, Mortenson said. “Now they have actual buildings.”

Nothing happens fast here, and building a school, particularly one for girls, is seldom simple. But once the school is built, it invariably blossoms, he said.

In Chunda village, for example “it took CAI eight years to convince the ulema, or religious leaders, to allow one girl to attend school,” Mortenson said. Yet by the time the Chunda Girls’ School opened in 2007, there were 74 girls enrolled. By the fall of 2008, 241 girls had enrolled – more than tripling the number of students in just one year.

Villagers are willing to wage such lengthy battles, haul heavy loads of building material on their backs for miles, or do just about whatever it takes to get a school built because their desire for education is so great. In a place where one out of every four children dies before their first birthday and only about 4 percent of people can read and write, villagers are enormously grateful for CAI’s presence in their communities.

And CAI schools are making a long-term difference. “In the Northern Areas, where we have worked for 15 years, we are seeing the results of the first wave of literate men and women,” Mortenson said. “Hundreds of them now have become teachers. Eight of them are in medical school, and about a dozen in health care.”

Shakeela Khan is one shining example of the success of CAI schools. She’s in her third year of medical school in Lahore and “getting scores in the 90s,” Mortenson said.

“She was the first female to graduate from high school in the Husha Valley and will be the first locally educated woman to become a physician,” he said. [See pp. 207-208 in “Three Cups of Tea.”] Shakeela’s main concern is the “staggering maternal mortality rate in Husha. Dozens of women die during childbirth every year.”

Her father, Mohammed Aslam Khan, originally wanted her to become a teacher, “because he thought that would be a cleaner, less messy job,” Mortenson said. But Shakeela was undeterred. “She is very determined to graduate and then come back and serve her people.” And her father has come around. “He is very proud of her.”

Another young woman, Jahan Ali, was one of the first female graduates of Mortenson’s first school, in Korphe village, and granddaughter of Haji Ali, Mortenson’s mentor. [See pp. 299-300 in “Three Cups of Tea.”]

Today, Jahan is working via a university extension program on a degree in health-care policy, Mortenson said “She took rural health-care provider training, went back to Korphe for a year and worked, but now has returned to school. She wants to affect health care reform on a national level.”

Another CAI student who has made amazing progress is Nasreen Gul of the Charpusan Valley. In 1999, as CAI was beginning its work in that remote area, Nasreen told Mortenson she wanted to become a maternal health-care worker.
The ancient Indus Valley civilization spread over much of what is today Pakistan. Over the centuries, the region was invaded by Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Arabs, Afghans and Turks.

1947: British, before leaving region, draw line creating Muslim nation of Pakistan and Hindu nation of India.
1948: War with India over disputed Kashmir territory
1965: War with India over disputed Kashmir territory.
1971: Civil war in East Pakistan and war with India result in secession of Bangladesh.
1973: Constitution approved.
1988: Zia dies in plane crash.
1988-1999: Civilian governments alternately headed by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif; each elected twice and removed from office on corruption charges.
1998: Pakistan conducts its first nuclear weapons tests.
1999: Kargil conflict with India; war in the Siachen glacier region.

2008 PAKISTAN TIMELINE

February: Voters elect new civilian government, led by Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto’s widower and leader of Pakistan Peoples Party, and Sharif, former prime minister and leader of Pakistan Muslim League-N.
May: Pakistani authorities sign peace deal with NWFP government to end military operations in Swat Valley.
June: Jihadist fighters agree to resolve differences, commit more fighters to battle Americans in Afghanistan.
June: Increase in militants crossing border into Afghanistan, attacking U.S. posts, killing U.S. and coalition soldiers.
June: U.S. begins months-long flurry of strikes against alleged militant sanctuaries on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.
July: Government’s peace deal with NWFP falls apart.
August: Musharraf resigns.
August: Sharif leaves coalition government.
August: National Commission for Human Development — 80,000-plus employees and massive network of education, adult literacy, primary healthcare and community development projects in pursuit of UN Millennium Development Goals — unexpectedly closes due to a lack of federal funding.
September: Zardari elected president; calls fight against terror “Pakistan’s own war.”
September: U.S. acknowledges policy of attacks in Pakistan was authorized by U.S. President Bush in July.
Sept. 20: Truck bombing of Marriott Hotel in Islamabad kills more than 50 people.
September and October: U.S. strikes alleged militants’ sanctuaries in Pakistan.
October: Intelligence agencies brief lawmakers about the militant threat.
October: Higher Education Commission Chairman Dr. Attaur Rehman resigns.
October: Taliban suicide-bomber attacks meeting of tribal leaders organizing against Taliban.
October: Pakistan government seeks emergency financing from International Monetary Fund.

PAKISTAN DETAILS

Facts: Islamic Republic of Pakistan
Area: 803,940 sq km; slightly less than twice the size of California.
Population: 172.8 million
Arable land: 25 percent
Life expectancy: 64 years
Literacy rate: 49 percent (over age 15 who can read and write)
Living below poverty level: 24 percent
Religion: Sunni Muslim (75 percent); Shia Muslim (20 percent); other (5 percent)
Languages: Urdu is official language; English is lingua franca of Pakistani elite and government. Other languages include Punjabi, Sindhi, Siraiki, Pashto and Balochi.
Terrain: Flat Indus River plain east; mountains in north and northwest; Balochistan plateau in west (highest point is K2, 8,611 meters)
Ethnic groups: Punjabi, Pashtun, Sindhi, Siraiki, Muhagirs, Balochi.

AFGHANISTAN DETAILS

Facts: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Area: 251,737 square miles, landlocked; slightly smaller than Texas
Population: 32.7 million
Arable land: 12 percent
Life expectancy: 44 years
Literacy rate: 28 percent (over age 15 who can read and write)
Living below poverty level: 53 percent (2003)
Religion: Sunni Muslim (80 percent); Shia Muslim (19 percent); other (1 percent)
Languages: Dari, Pashto, Uzbek, Turkmen and 30 minor languages.
Terrain: Mostly rugged mountains, plains in north and southwest.
Ethnic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Turkmen, Baloch

— Source: CIA World Fact Book
She was 20 years old and pleading for his help. Mortenson was amenable. But the village elders said no.

Nasreen had already demonstrated amazing determination. She attended school until she was 12, when her mother died and she had to drop out to care for her four younger siblings and her blind father.

“After tending to my siblings and doing all the household work, I would wait till everyone was asleep,” she told Sadia Ashraf, CAI’s outreach and special events coordinator, who interviewed Nasreen in August. “Then late at night I would study by the light of a dim kerosene lamp.”

Nasreen took her 10th-grade matriculation exams at age 15. She had done it. But just a year later, at age 16, she was married. Her orthodox mother-in-law worked her to the ground. Insults about women who were not content to stay at home, cook and have babies.

Yet Nasreen, who was working as a midwife, clung to her dream. Her husband supported her and the young family eventually moved to a separate house — away from his mother.

Nasreen still hungered for more education. She knew her eighth-grade education was lacking, but she lives in one of the most remote valleys in Pakistan, a 14-hour drive through the mountains to the nearest city, Gilgit. She had few options.

This year, the village elders finally conceded: when Nasreen, 29, spoke to Ashraf, she was living in an apartment near Islamabad with her husband and three children. She’s attending university and working on a nursing degree. It’s a dream come true.

“I wish I was younger and unmarried when I had this option. But now, it’s all worthwhile and my life’s dream to be a health care worker in the most remote places is coming true.”

Long, hard journeys are all too common in this part of the world. CAI is working hard to make more journeys turn out like Nasreen’s.

Azad Kashmir
East of the Northern Areas is Azad-Kashmir, the region horribly battered by a 7.6-magnitude earthquake three years ago, and the place where CAI recently built the library.

For many people, it has taken years to be able to describe what happened to them on Saturday, Oct. 8, 2005. On that day, their world changed. Thousands of villages across northern Pakistan and northern India crumbled to the ground. More than 73,000 people were killed. Another 3.5 million were suddenly homeless.

Teacher Robina Naseer was in her classroom at the Balseri School when the earth shook.

“The school collapsed down and I ran out. God saved me. I don’t know how I got out, I just ran,” she recalled. “After one and a half hours, I went back. Our staff was OK. One teacher lost a 12-year-old child. One teacher lost a 6-month-old child. Mostly children were lost. There were children without parents, parents without children, dead bodies so severely maimed that parents couldn’t recognize who died.

“Everything was spoiled and destroyed,” she said in March, shaking her head at the memory. “There were dead bodies on the road. When the earth cracked and opened up, people disappeared. It looked like magic. Their dead bodies were not found. Buses and jeeps were buried under landslides. There was a panic to bury bodies without religious formalities.

Dusk settles in the Kashmir village of Patika where the October 2005 earthquake destroyed homes, schools and families.

SOURCE: Pakistan Ministry of Education
“And the land was still sliding, cracking, dust was everywhere. The smell was horrible. The river color was changing to light red because of all the blood and dead bodies and dead animals — people threw them in the rivers and streams and because of that the water was polluted.

“All this has a psychological effect on people. I think every person here needs psychiatric help,” Naseer said.

The scars are deep.

Pre-quake, Azad Kashmir was actually more developed than other places where CAI works. There were schools and electricity, some homes even had indoor plumbing. It was poor by Western standards, but there were thousands of government schools for girls and boys, and the literacy rate was much higher than in the Northern Areas.

Most of the roads had been cut by Pakistan’s Army, which in the course of its 60-year battle with India had closed Kashmir to outsiders and turned it into one of the most militarized regions in the world.

But after the earthquake, everything fell apart. The borders were thrown wide open to accommodate the international aid groups pouring into the region.

Three years later, the damage is still evident. Many people still live in tents. Rubble is everywhere, as are the graves of the dead. There are huge cracks in cement buildings, reconstruction materials are piled in front of stores in the markets and electrical wires are strung haphazardly between buildings.

At the rate things are going, it will take many more years before Kashmir returns to any semblance of normalcy. The disaster was that huge. Yet many of the international aid groups, designed to respond to immediate crises and then move on, have left.

“CAI helps in Azad Kashmir primarily because a year after the 2005 earthquake we noticed that aid and support had dropped about 70 percent and few NGOs and government agencies were focused on rebuilding the devastated education system,” Mortenson said.

“We mainly want to provide hope in a region that has suffered tremendously,” Mortenson said. “We want the people to know that we will be there for them for a long time.”

The government organization in charge of putting things back together in Azad-Kashmir is SERRA, the State Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency.

At a meeting with CAI staff in March, Dr. Syed Asif Hussain, SERRA’s district general secretary, said he still had a list of 5,000 schools that had still not been “adopted” for reconstruction. If CAI was willing, he suggested its staff pick from those.

When Chabot and Sarfraz Khan, CAI operations director, gave him a list of the schools CAI had already built, a look of surprised relief swept across Hussain’s face. In one fell swoop he was able to cross 13 school reconstruction projects off that list of 5,000.

That was in March. By October, the number of CAI-rebuilt schools in Azad-Kashmir had risen to 17.

One of those schools is in Behdi, a few hours from Muzaffarabad. Getting there requires navigating a steep, twisting, rutted jeep trail that follows a Neelum River feeder stream up the mountain. The grandeur of the place hides the poverty from afar, but up close it is clear that folks here are just scraping by.

“Nobody is coming here. This is a very backward area of the world,” said Mustafa Mughal, a construction supervisor in the village.

The villagers grow crops, corn and wheat mostly, and raise sheep, cows and goats for milk and meat. They used to do a lot of hunting as well, but that’s been restricted since 1996, when a big swath of adjacent land became Machiara National Park.

Up here, the 2005 quake shook the mountains, triggered landslides and destroyed schools. “Large numbers of students died,” Mughal said.

CAI has erected a new earthquake-proof, girls’ middle school in the village, and is working with a group of women on a vocational center. A French NGO is building a girls’ high school and there is a boys’ high school as well.

But education in the village stops after 10th grade.

Scholarship program
CAI’s schools in remote Pakistan address some of the immediate needs for Pakistan’s younger students. But over the years, CAI has begun to hone in on ways to help girls once they have completed the highest level of education available in their villages.

“There are so many girls with great potential and limited opportunity,” Chabot said.

One such young woman is Farsana Hussain, who lives in the Kashmiri village of Nouseri with her father and siblings. Her mother died in the earthquake.

Farsana is a bright, ambitious girl who finished middle school a few years ago, but was unable to continue her education. There is no high school for girls in the area and her family had no money to send her to school in the city.

Further complicating things was that while CAI was exploring options with her, she turned 18, and the city high schools won’t allow older students to attend lower-level classes, Chabot explained.

Yet Farsana has enormous potential. She has that drive and determination Chabot talked about. She has family and community support.

So CAI hired a private tutor to help Farsana prepare for the national high-school exams. Once she passes those, she can apply for enrollment in a university, and CAI will help with a scholarship.

Girls and women also face cultural limitations that complicate their efforts to continue their education. Families are reluctant to let daughters travel to and from the city daily to attend classes; and in some cases that’s out of the question anyway due to the vast distance and impossible logistics. Sending a girl to live in the city, alone, without a male family member there for protection, is pretty much unheard of.

“The male student, he can travel the long distance from the village to the city easily,” Shaukat Ali, the Gundi Piran teacher, said. “The girl, she cannot. We must appreciate this.”
That leaves just one option for most girls — moving to the city and living in a hostel.

Haji Ghulam Parvi, CAI’s program manager in the Northern Areas, has been working for a few years to get a hostel up and running in Skardu. When it is complete, the two-story Tibbet Hostel will house students dorm-style, with six students per room and distinct separation between boys’ and girls’ quarters, Parvi said.

He anticipates it will house 84 students, “if we have one student per school” from the Northern Areas, “plus some others, since Dr. Greg cannot say no to anybody …” he trailed off and shrugged his shoulders.

The hostel will also have a library, game room, kitchen and dining hall, bathrooms and a mosque, he said.

For girls in Azad Kashmir, Chabot found a well-run, safe girls’ hostel in the Islamabad area. To select the first eight girls to make the move, she and Khan came up with three criteria.

“First, we have discussions with the school staff and different community leaders in each area to identify girls who have a desire and a drive to go and get a higher education,” Chabot said. “Second is that they have to be needy.

“And third, there has to be 100 percent community and family support. Because the only way a girl will successfully go to the city and come back to the village is if they have all bought into it. It is the same philosophy we use to build a school.”

Eight girls have from Azad Kashmir received scholarships in the fall of 2008 and are studying in the Islamabad area. Most are enrolled in ninth through 12th grade, and a few in universities.

A ninth, Fozia Naseer, a 26-year-old Kashmiri woman, is studying at Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana, for a year. She’s the first woman from her mountain village ever to leave the country for education.

“It is a big deal — most of all for a girl,” Naseer said. “Not a single girl from my village is in the United States. Or in England. Or anywhere. I’m the first one.”

The university gave her a full scholarship and CAI is covering her living expenses. Hers is a unique situation; CAI doesn’t intend to bring a lot of students to the United States. But Fozia is one of a kind. She already has an undergrad degree in political science, teacher training and just finished her law degree. She is in the states improving her English skills, learning how to use a computer, and studying international relations. The goal is that next spring she will return to Kashmir and work.

In Charpusan, in addition to Naseer, eight girls have received scholarships this year to continue their education in Gilgit. Saidul lah Baig, who runs CAI’s schools in that valley, selected one girl from each of the eight CAI schools there. His qualifications are a little more rigid, Chabot said.

“In Kashmir, we found we don’t have so many (families) pushing the grades and motivation, but do have the economic need,” she said. “In Charpusan, we found almost all of them have the economic need, but a lot of them also have the academic ability, the grades and the motivation and support from their families, too.

“What’s unique to Charpusan is that no matter how remote it is and how few resources they have, there’s a strong academic emphasis. They’re trying to get the students to a level of being able to pass national exams so each child from each village has a chance to go on to higher education. You really see a lot of support from the families and communities. The progress is pretty incredible,” she said.

EDUCATIONAL HONORS
CAI’s Greg Mortenson received honorary doctorate degrees in 2008 from:

- Montana State University;
- Villanova University;
- University of San Francisco;
- University of Washington;
- Lewis and Clark College;
- and Seattle University.

He also received five awards:

- U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy’s National Award for Citizen Diplomacy
- Peace Abbey’s Courage of Conscience Award;
- Wartburg College’s Graven Award;
- St. Louis University’s Sword of Loyola Award;
- and induction into the Academy of Achievement.
Two months after her father died in February 2008, Fatima Abdulfatah, 13, right, enrolled in the Central Asia Institute English and Computer Learning Center in Kabul to learn some job skills. As the oldest child, she is now responsible for supporting her family.

Fatima Abdulfatah is 13 years old, the oldest child in her family. She was born in Afghanistan during the Taliban’s hard-line Islamic regime and has grown up in a country plagued by war and poverty.

After her father died in the spring of 2008 of health problems, Fatima’s mother informed her she would have to go to work to help support her younger brother and sister and keep the family alive.

Fatima has no job skills — after all, she’s only in eighth grade. But she is determined. And she’s smart enough to know that she’ll need some office skills if she’s ever to land a good-paying job in a safe place.

So she went to Central Asia Institute’s computer center in Kabul and asked for help.

Like hundreds of other skill-hungry people in the capital of this war-torn nation, Fatima is learning English and basic computer skills, laying the groundwork for a brighter future.

And CAI’s program director in Afghanistan, Wakil Karimi, says he sees enough promise in the young girl that he has committed to hiring her as a computer and English teacher when she has finished her training.

Fatima’s story offers hope amid great misery.

There is no shortage of bad news coming out of Afghanistan. The situation with Pakistan grows increasingly tense. The drug trade creates its own economy, corruption and addiction crisis. Suicide bombings and attacks on foreign troops are at their highest levels since the United States invaded in 2001.

U.S. and coalition leaders grimly predict that it will take more money, more troops and less corruption in the national government to bring things under control. The situation is likely to get worse, they say, before it gets any better.

But there is good news, too.
American and coalition troops are finding new and better ways to deal with tribal leaders in an effort to hold territory, protect civilians and stop the spread of extremist violence.

They have concluded that centralized reconstruction of Afghanistan won’t work. Any solution to Afghanistan’s overwhelming problems must take into account the country’s provincial, tribal nature. It’s something that Greg Mortenson, executive director of Central Asia Institute, has been saying for a long time. A peaceful resolution begins locally, with talking to everyone involved.

“The architects of the Marshall Plan, implemented at the end of World War II, were genius,” he said. “The main thrust was decentralization, putting a lot of authority on local people. It’s unfortunate that it took the U.S. five to six years before we really started to understand that the key to future stability and peace in Afghanistan was to use a similar community-based, provincial model.”

It’s the same with CAI’s schools, Mortenson said. It all starts with building relationships.

“We do have tea with the Taliban sometimes,” Mortenson said. “We have to.”

Building schools

Some of the best news coming out of Afghanistan involves education, Mortenson said. Therein lies hope for the future.

At long last, more Afghan children are attending school than have been for decades; some 6 million were enrolled as of 2008, compared to 800,000 in 2000.

But, there’s still a long way to go. The country still has the lowest literacy rates in Asia. Education is free at all levels, but schools, books and teachers are in short supply. And poverty and safety concerns mean many parents keep children at home; it’s often too expensive or too dangerous for kids to be in classrooms.

“Two million children of primary-school age, 54 percent, are out of school, with an estimated 1.3 million of these being girls,” according to a 2007 UNICEF summary. “Attacks on schools have been on the rise and gains made in education in the last five years run the risk of being lost. More than 100 school incidents, including school burnings, missile attacks, explosions and threats against staff and families, have been reported since January 2005.

“Children eager to be educated and included are being schooled in tents, under trees or canvases, dilapidated buildings or exposed openly to the harsh climatic conditions of Afghanistan,” according to UNICEF. “Despite the approximately 2,000 schools that have been rehabilitated or constructed since 2002, there is a projected need (for) construction of an additional 2,000 schools every year for three years.”

That’s where CAI comes in.

Kunar

In 2008, CAI built two new schools in the troubled Kunar Province in eastern Afghanistan.

“CAI’s mission is to put in schools in areas that are under- or unserved in terms of education, whether due to physical isolation, religious extremism or conflict or war,” Mortenson said. “Kunar has all three.”

The people of the province are a mix of Pathans and Nuristanis, and “although it is labeled as strong Taliban haven, most people are very suspect of outsiders. They have lived there for centuries. Some claim to be descendants of Alexander the Great,” he said.

Kunar, with a population of about 321,000, is poor, undeveloped and fraught with violence. It is adjacent to Bajaur tribal agency in Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province, where recently there has been “cross-border fighting and U.S. predator drones firing Hellfire missiles” at insurgents, Mortenson said.

Further complicating the situation are 16,000 Pakistan refugees who fled the October fighting and bombing and now live in tents in refugee camps around Kunar’s provincial capital, Asasabad.
Not that Kunar is a peaceful sanctuary. In many villages, “The Taliban come in at night making demands, they want a goat, or chapati or the trails swept up behind them after they leave. ‘Or we’ll kill you,’” Mortenson said.

The Taliban interfere with economic development projects, too.

“In June, the Taliban attacked a crew of 18 road workers from Saw village, workers who just had shovels and were earning $1 or a $1.50 a day,” he said. “They killed six of them, beheaded them and told the others they shouldn’t be working on the road.”

But the violence didn’t have the intended effect, he said.

“The next day, the village sent 80 people down to work on the road,” he said.

That frustration with insurgent interference and the villagers’ determination to build a better future was witnessed by U.S. Army Lt. Col. Christopher Kolenda, who ran the U.S. military’s forward operating base, or FOB, in Kunar’s Naray District for 16 months. Kolenda read “Three Cups of Tea,” and was inspired to reach out to Mortenson via e-mail in 2007. He wrote:

“I am convinced that the long-term solution to terrorism in general and Afghanistan specifically is education. The conflict here will not be won with bombs, but with books and ideas that excite the imagination toward peace, tolerance, and prosperity.

“The thirst for education here is palpable. People are tired of war after 30 years and want a better future. Education will make the difference whether the next generation grows up to be educated patriots or illiterate fighters. The stakes could not be higher.”

CAI had already been networking in the Naray District, but Kolenda’s letter prompted a more focused effort, Mortenson said.

“We had jirgas there and the elders, the leaders, all said they wanted schools,” he said.

One of the new CAI schools is about a 30-minute drive east of Kolenda’s base, near the Pakistan border.

“The village already had an outdoor school for a decade,” Mortenson said. “The girls began going to school three years ago, but in small numbers. For the past two years, the boys have gone to school in a tent and the girls were stuffed into a tightly packed, open-roof mud shelter.”

But getting a school built was no easy task.

“We had to first wait for a bridge to be built across the Kunar River, which was a combined project of many organizations and the Afghan government,” Mortenson said.

A year later, thanks to the indomitable Sarfraz Khan, CAI’s Pakistan-based operations director, and Karimi in Kabul, children are attending classes. The five-room school serves 320 children — 200 boys and 120 girls in separate shifts.

The other CAI school in Kunar, which Mortenson also prefers not to name for security reasons, is also co-ed and will serve hundreds of children.

Meanwhile, CAI began working west of Kunar in Panjshir Province, home to 328,620 people, mostly of Tajik descent.

“They are pretty progressive people and many of them speak English,” said Doug Chabot, a field guide for CAI who visited the area in July. “Because of their history they are known as being fierce mujahadeen. They are very proud, solid people.”

Central Asia Institute program director Wakil Karimi discusses the location of a new school in Dar Khil village in the Panjshir Valley with headmaster Faruq Ghulam.
Panjshir is also the home and burial place of rebel leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, known as the “Lion of the Panjshir.” He was a mujahadeen leader during the Soviet occupation and led the opposition Northern Alliance during the Taliban regime. A hero to many Afghans, Massoud was killed by two al-Qaeda suicide bombers posing as photojournalists on Sept. 9, 2001. His tomb is atop a hill in his home village, Jangalak.

The landscape is rugged and stunning. At the southern edge of the Panjshir River valley, Chabot said, is a narrow, rocky gorge, which served as “a great natural defense against the Soviets.” The gorge opens up into a large valley, a few miles wide.

“The valley bottom, where the river is, is where most of the crops are grown — wheat, fruit and lots of apricots,” Chabot said. The side hills are brown, with low-lying scrub and brush, “unless they have irrigation, which they do in spots.”

The province has a U.S. FOB and a strong military presence, he said. In addition to warding off insurgents, troops are building infrastructure — schools, roads, hospitals and water projects.

“Where it might have been sketchy a few years ago, the area is stable,” Chabot said. “The next step is for NGOs to come in and help the people, and that’s what we were able to do.”

He and Karimi traveled to Panjshir several times early in the summer of 2008 to meet with provincial education officials.

“They said there was a need for dozens of schools. They said there were teachers and students, but no buildings. The children were being taught in the dirt,” Chabot recalled. “And we said, ‘We can help you out with that.’

“We explained CAI’s interest in girls’ schools, and they gave us a list of 12. We whittled it down … to about four. And then over two days (Karimi) and I and a government education director drove around and visited these places, met with community leaders and chose two of them. The ones we chose were mainly because the community was so helpful and excited and they offered free land. They had all that good energy. And they were very open to girls’ schools. Actually, the government has girls’ schools in place, and just needed buildings.”

CAI’s two schools in Panjshir are both girls’ primary schools. One will be six classrooms for 200 girls and the other will be eight classrooms for about 400 girls. Construction has begun on both of them.

Badakhshan

CAI’s work in Afghanistan goes back to late 2001, when Mortenson and Khan met with tribal leaders in the remote, northernmost province of Badakhshan. In the years since, they have negotiated for and built 14 schools, including 12 in the narrow, 200-mile-long Wakhan Corridor tucked between Tajikistan and Pakistan.

Badakhshan is rocky and seismically active, prone to flash floods and landslides, and isolated, especially during the winter. It is, according to the World Bank, “one of the most remote provinces in Afghanistan with few roads, but with a strong history of community participation.”

That community participation is what has made CAI such a good fit.

Badakhshan is safer than some of the country, but the war is still a reality, and investment in the region has been minimal. Economic development — especially schools, electricity, safe drinking water and health care — is sorely needed.
The government schools are so few and far between that students often travel, usually on foot, two to five hours to get to class. Teachers aren’t particularly well trained and books and supplies are scarce.

Yet community leaders know any progress depends on education. Badakhshan residents are mostly poor, either nomadic herders or subsistence farmers. Increasingly, men head out of the villages in search of wage labor. That work includes poppy cultivation. The province is among the top 10 largest poppy-cultivating provinces in Afghanistan, although production has declined as a result of international efforts to introduce other crops, according the World Bank. But opium addiction remains a major problem.

So it is no surprise that village leaders are interested in working with CAI.

In August 2008, Mortenson was in the province to dedicate CAI’s new Ishkashim Girls’ High School, the largest school ever built in the region. During his visit, community leaders lined up to pitch their projects.

Before long he had added three projects — including a women’s vocational center and ambitious plans for a girls’ secondary school in Shouhada, a conservative Sunni village in the province where women wear burkas on the rare occasions when they venture outside their homes — to the other projects his staff will carry out in this remote area in 2009.

By the time those projects are complete, CAI will have doubled its presence in the far-northern region.

Kabul

Back in Kabul, Karimi is busy juggling all these new projects, as well as the successful computer school, the Displaced Girls’ School, also in Kabul, and the village school in Lalander.

His work with CAI started in 2001 and led to the building of the Lalander school in 2004, south of the city. That school has thrived.

Enrollment in the Displaced Girls’ School, which operates in a private home in Kabul, continues to grow, too. The home-based school is necessary because many parents are still reluctant to send their daughters to public places for education, either for religious reasons or because of fears their children will become targets of extremists.

Kabul is a dangerous place for many of its 5 million inhabitants these days. Although it has been seven years since the U.S. invaded, security in the capital has eroded. Suicide bombings, kidnappings, robberies and shootings take place with alarming regularity. Soldiers, police and private guards are everywhere, but many residents don’t feel safe. People live in a near-constant state of fear and vulnerability.

But CAI continues to find ways to inspire hope.

The computer center is CAI’s first such project and its success has exceeded everyone’s expectations. In addition to helping computer-illiterate children and adults acquire the skills needed for work in the modern world, the center offers English and math classes. Nontraditional students include small business owners, doctors and other professionals.

“More than 800 people have already graduated, about half of whom are female,” Mortenson said. “People come from distant cities in Afghanistan, from Jalalabad and Kandahar. One benefit is that it is not in central Kabul, where office space is cost prohibitive and security and other issues become a concern. That in turn makes it accessible to the average Afghan.”

Mr. Abdullah, a district school administrator in Kabul, told Mortenson that CAI’s computer center is “a tremendous help to our fledgling training programs, which are underfunded and unsupported,” Mortenson recalled. “CAI helps to bridge that gap between completing education and having the tools to go out and get jobs. He’s giddy about this.”

The program has been so successful, in fact, that Mortenson and Karimi expect that within two years it will be self-supporting, and perhaps even generate funds for other CAI projects in Afghanistan.
In one bazaar in Nangarhar Province, in eastern Afghanistan, thousands of kilos of opium are bought and sold every day, the BBC reported in June.

Growers tread footpaths for hours from their homes to sell what they grow in their fields, the British news service reported. The shopping area is filled with people carrying sacks of money, pistol-toting dealers coming and going and the smell of opium, which Afghans call “maal.”

One opium trader told the BBC, “If we had roads, clinics, factories and if there were job opportunities I would not do what I am doing now.”

A grower said, “I sell my opium to feed my family … When I have water and roads provided to me, I will stop growing poppies.”

It is a scene repeated in villages and cities across the war-torn, impoverished country.

Afghanistan is the world’s biggest producer of heroin and opium, and the volume has increased every year since 2004.

According to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, last year Afghanistan produced 93 percent of the world’s opium. The estimated value of the poppy cultivation, opium production and narcotics trafficking is a whopping $4 billion.

Only a quarter of the money goes to the growers. The rest is paid to local leaders, the Taliban, corrupt government officials and the traffickers. The result is a thriving drug trade that makes up 60 percent of Afghanistan’s economy.

The reasons most people involved in the drug trade operate with impunity are complicated and not easily resolved. Experts chalk it up to the absence of law in rural areas, rampant joblessness and corrupt government officials.

It’s also a fact that agriculture supports most Afghans.

Even though only 12 percent of Afghanistan’s land is arable, 70 percent of Afghans make a living as farmers, according to an October 2007 report from the U.S. Army War College. “During good years, Afghanistan produced enough food to feed its people as well as supply a surplus for export. Its traditional agricultural products include wheat, corn, barley, rice, cotton, fruit, nuts, and grapes.”

Opium trade thrives in war-torn Afghanistan

“If we had roads, clinics, factories and if there were job opportunities I would not do what I am doing now.”

AFGHAN OPIUM TRADER

Story by Karin Ronnow
AFGHANISTAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Afghanistan Ministry of Education is responsible for managing and delivering both formal and non-formal education.

Non-formal education is literacy training (a nine-month course equivalent to Grade 4 entry) for out-of-school children and adults. Boys and girls are generally schooled separately.

Formal education is defined as:
- General education (Primary 1-6; Secondary 7 to 12)
- Islamic education (Grade 1 to 14)
- Community-based education in rural areas (Grade 1 to 6)
- Teacher education (Grade 10 to 14)
- Technical and vocational education (Grade 10 to 14)

Children are taught in Dari/Persian or Pashtu through third grade and a second official language is introduced in fourth grade. Arabic is also part of the curriculum so that students can read the Koran.

Madrassas generally teach the Koran, the Hadith (Prophet Mohammad’s words) and religious texts.

Higher education is available at the University of Kabul, founded in 1932; the University of Nangarhar in Jalalabad, founded in 1962; plus six newer universities.

The school year runs from September to June in the warmer parts of the country, from early March to November in the cold areas.

Source: Afghan Ministry of Education

OPium Trade

Thirty years ago, grapes and raisins were a major export crop.

But in the 1980s, during the Soviet Occupation, opposition leaders, the mujahadeen, turned to opium as a way to generate cash to buy weapons. The United States government supported those leaders and simply ignored the opium trade.

And the country has been consumed by war ever since, with law enforcement virtually non-existent. Even now, growers and traders who know it is illegal, such as those mentioned, are frustrated and desperate.

The alternative crops that everyone talks about - fruits and vegetables, wheat and cereals - can only be grown if there are roads for farmers to get their produce to market, which there aren’t, and if the growers have adequate funds to pay the corrupt police at the ubiquitous check points, which they don’t.

In recent years, counter-narcotics efforts have made a dent in the places where poppies are grown, but not necessarily in the volume. The Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics reported this past spring that in 2008, about 20 provinces in the north, east and northeast of the country were poppy-free, up from 16 the year before.

But the UNDOC has warned that Afghanistan’s total opium production levels could remain similar to last year’s record harvest due to increased production in the south and southwest of the country, where farmers have continued to grow opium at “an alarming rate.”

Source: News reports

AFGHANISTAN 2008 TIMELINE

**JANUARY:** Suicide bomber kills six at five-star luxury Serena Hotel in Kabul (targeting Norwegian foreign minister).

**APRIL:** Terrorist incidents in eastern Afghanistan 50 percent higher than April 2007.

**APRIL 27:** President Karzai escapes attempt on his life during military parade.

**JUNE:** Deadliest month for coalition forces in Afghanistan; 28 soldiers killed.

**JUNE 8:** First lady Laura Bush makes surprise visit to Kabul and announces U.S. will provide $40 million over five years for education in Afghanistan.

**JUNE 13:** Taliban fighters break 1,200 prisoners out of Kandahar jail.

**JULY 7:** Bombing at the Indian embassy in Kabul kills at least 58 people.

**SEPT. 3:** War spills over into Pakistan when suspected U.S. soldiers attack village on the border.

**SEPT. 11:** Militants kill two U.S. soldiers in eastern part of country, bringing total U.S. losses to 113 and making 2008 the deadliest year for U.S. troops since start of war.

**OCT. 1:** Suspected U.S. Predator drone fires missile into Pakistan.

**OCT. 1:** U.S. Gen. David McKiernan calls for more combat brigades, roughly 20,000 soldiers. Says situation likely to get worse before it gets better.

**OCTOBER:** Afghan President Hamid Karzai tries unsuccessfully to negotiate with Taliban leaders, with Saudi Arabia as intermediary.

**OCTOBER:** Departing U.K. commander of British forces says the defeat of Taliban fighters is “neither feasible nor supportable.”

**NOVEMBER:** U.S. Gen. David Petraeus assumes command of CENTCOM.
“There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls.”
– Kofi Annan, former U.N. Secretary General

A teacher leads a class in a private home in Kabul, Afghanistan, funded by CAI, where girls of all ages can attend school safely. The Taliban opposes girls’ education, and has threatened and attacked many schools in Afghanistan, leading some parents to keep their girls from attending traditional schools.

Educate girls, change the world

Building girls’ schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan might seem like a dangerous proposition.

After all, news reports that extremists are destroying girls’ schools, threatening female students and their families, or intimidating teachers are increasingly common.

Yet schools built by the Central Asia Institute remain safe.

“These are not CAI schools, thankfully,” Greg Mortenson, CAI’s executive director, said following reports of 11 girls’ schools destroyed in northwest Pakistan in September 2008.

There are basically two reasons why CAI schools aren’t targeted. First, the attacks tend to be in places where CAI schools are not. Second, even when extremists come close, they tend to leave CAI schools alone. That’s because CAI works hard from day one to ensure that there is resounding community support in any village where CAI builds a school.

Sometimes that takes years. But the payoff is that once a school is built and girls and boys enrolled, the villagers protect the school with their lives.

As for why it’s important to take the risk and build girls’ schools at all, Mortenson says back in the mid-1990s, shortly after he began CAI, he was researching community development models of education and the message was repeated again and again — no other investment is more effective for reaching development goals than educating girls.

It reinforced something he had heard as a child growing up in Tanzania, the son of Lutheran missionaries.
“It goes to the African proverb I learned as a child on the slopes of Kilimanjaro where I grew up for 14 years: “If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. But if you educate a girl, you educate a community.” It’s an ancient truth. Yet understanding and applying it is still a challenge in modern times.

What keeps them away

Of the estimated 750 million illiterate adults in the world, more than 60 percent are women, according to international literacy experts. The Global Campaign for Education calls that statistic “shocking,” since women’s literacy in particular is so directly linked to the achievement of other development gains.

But the social, economic and cultural barriers that keep girls in poor countries out of school are numerous and, in some cases, deeply entrenched.

In some cases the barriers are religious. Islamic extremists like the Taliban in Afghanistan ban education for females. Militant leaders proclaim that teaching girls violates the Koran and they oppose girls’ schools at every turn.

But Mortenson says the intense opposition is rooted in the extremists’ recognition that the better educated a woman is, the less likely she will be to let her children join the Taliban or any other violent extremist movement.

“Their greatest fear is not the bullet, but it’s the pen,” he said. “They fear that if the girl gets an education, grows up and becomes a mother, they’ll lose future recruits.”

But religion is not the only barrier to girls’ education. Poverty is a significant hurdle. Girls are needed to help in the fields or at home raising children. School fees and the cost of books and uniforms mean that when a family has to make a choice between sending a boy or girl to school, the boy is often chosen, with the belief that it’s a better investment. Woven into that is the perception that girls should stay home because they are less likely to grow up and get paid work. It’s a vicious cycle.

Another barrier is distance. Sometimes the schools that will accept girls are just too far away. Parents aren’t comfortable having their girls walk for hours each way in rural areas, especially in war zones.
And then there are the seemingly obvious but often overlooked aspects of the need for privacy and safety at the schools themselves. Parents may not say it, but they want their girls to go to schools with boundary walls and private toilets, especially adolescent girls. And, due to fear of sexual harassment or even violence, they steer clear of schools that employ male teachers.

But times are changing. Mortenson said he learned years ago from his mentor Haji Ali in Korphe village in northern Pakistan that one of the most important things he could do when visiting the remote villages where he builds schools is to listen. So, he does.

And when he asks older women in rural Pakistan and Afghanistan what they want most, they say, “We don’t want our babies to die and we want our children — including daughters — to go to school.”

“It is women who bring life into the world, nurture children and want them to have hope and be able to make decisions,” he said. “Although men help promote education, its really women who value what education can do and carry on the tradition in society. Hence, as a servant of the good people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, that is what we prioritize.”

The Council on Foreign Relations’ “What Works in Girls’ Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World,” spells out several key ingredients for successful girls’ schools, many of which Central Asia Institute has incorporated.

- Build schools close to girls’ homes. School-age children are 10 to 20 percent more likely to attend school if they live in a village with a primary school. Proximity also increases parental involvement.
- Insist on community involvement. Community schools tend to meet culture norms and use local language. Community-based and supported schools generally have higher enrollment and quality and lower dropout rates.
- Build “girl-friendly” schools. Girls’ schools must have private latrines and boundary walls. In some cases, it’s most appropriate to build separate schools for girls.
- Provide female teachers. Recruit locally. Even very young women can teach programmed curricula effectively if they are trained and supported.
- Focus on quality education. Ensure a school has enough teachers, ongoing teacher training, heavy emphasis on math and science and adequate books and supplies.
- Invest in school health programs. Healthy kids have better attendance. Providing meals is a way to help parents afford school and help kids learn.
Abida Ghaffar is a teacher in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan, a conservative area where many women feel safer if they cover their faces in public.

A young girl at the Gultori Refugee Camp in Pakistan hesitates in a doorway before going to the community well to fetch water for her family. While some children are allowed to attend school, others stay home to herd animals and help with household chores.

**Why it’s important**

Most women know instinctively what researchers have spent decades proving – a girl is more likely to have a better, healthier life and raise healthier children if she goes to school.

Girls’ education is unique among development challenges in that “a striking body of empirical evidence” has shown enormous benefits, according to the Council on Foreign Relations’ “What Works in Girls’ Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World.”

Research has proven that educated girls are more likely to marry later, have fewer children, contribute to family income and insist their own children are educated, the council’s book states. They are less likely to die while giving birth and their children are less likely to die. They are less vulnerable to HIV-AIDS infection, sexual exploitation, human trafficking and child labor.

There are national benefits as well – including economic growth and prosperity and stronger democracies.

“In short, there may be no better investment for the health and development of poor countries around the world than investments to educate girls,” the council’s handbook concludes.
Mortenson often refers to the council's 101-page handbook. He also quotes Amartya Sen, the Nobel-prize winning Harvard economist who says just educating a girl to a fifth-grade level reduces infant mortality, reduces the population explosion and increases the well-being of the individual, any children she may have and society itself.

Interestingly, anecdotal evidence also seems to indicate that rural communities in Pakistan are beginning to place a greater value on educated girls when it comes to marriage. That's an enormous step forward in male-dominated societies where girls' education has long been seen as unnecessary.

Another unexpected benefit of girls' education is that young women who leave their home villages when they marry can maintain ties with their parents and siblings through letters, Mortenson said. That creates a much greater sense of well-being and connectedness, and provides a safety net for women who wind up in abusive situations.

It all boils down to one thing, he said. “If the girls aren't educated, nothing will change,” Mortenson said. “We can drop bombs, we can build roads or we can put in electricity. But unless the girls are educated, the world won't change.”

Two girls at Jafarabad School in northern Pakistan wait their turn for the playground swings in December 2007.
RETURNS ON INVESTMENT IN EDUCATING GIRLS

INCOME GROWTH
- Girls’ education leads to increased income for the girls themselves and for nations as a whole. Increasing the share of women with a secondary education by 1 percent boosts annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percent. That’s significant, since per capita income gains in developing countries seldom exceed 3 percent a year.**
- It also boosts farming productivity. Educated farmers are more efficient and their farms are more productive, which leads to increased crop yields and declines in malnutrition.*

MATERNAL AND CHILDREN’S HEALTH
- Educated women have smaller, healthier and better-educated families.
- The better educated the women in a society, the lower the fertility rate. A 2000 study in Brazil found that literate women had an average of 2.5 children while illiterate women had an average of 6 children.***
- The better educated the women, the lower the infant mortality rate. “The mother’s education is often the single most important influence on children’s survival. Primary education alone helps reduce infant mortality significantly, and secondary education helps even more. Education helps mothers learn what their children need to stay healthy and how to secure necessary support for their children – by using health services, improving nutrition and sanitation and taking advantage of their own increased earning capability. Girls who stay in school also marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for children.”*
- By increasing knowledge about health care and reducing the number of pregnancies, female education significantly reduces the risk of maternal mortality.**
- Educated women more likely to insist on education for their own children, especially their daughters. Their children study as much as two hours more each day than children of illiterate mothers and stay in school longer.*

WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT
- Educated girls and women are more likely to stand up for themselves and resist violence. “In poor areas where women are isolated within their communities, have little education and cannot earn much, girls are often regarded as an economic burden and women and girls sometimes suffer deliberate neglect or outright harm.”*
- Educated women channel more of their resources to the health and education of their children than men. *
- Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings and decision making. *
- Studies show that education promotes more representative, effective government. As women are educated and approach parity with men, research shows “governments and other institutions function better and with less corruption.”*

** The World Bank
*** UNESCO
BOZOI GOMBAD, Afghanistan — In a windswept meadow at 13,000 feet, sandwiched between the Little Pamir and Hindu Kush mountains, Mullah Rozi and Mehman Shah squat on the ground, beating rounded river rocks with large hammers to create suitable building material.

It would take some exploring to find a more remote place to build a school. There are a few adobe buildings here, but they are abandoned in the summer while the Kyrgyz nomads that inhabit these far reaches of the eastern Wakhan Corridor, also called the Pamir, graze their animals in higher meadows.

The only summer residents of Bozoi Gombad are the masons hired by Central Asia Institute to build a school.

The site of the co-ed, two-room school is right beside an old Soviet military base that was bulldozed under when the Red Army pulled out in 1989.

The school site can be accessed three ways – none of them easy. The masons began their journey in Pakistan’s Charpurson Valley, crossing over the 16,000-foot-high Irshad Pass, walking for three days, carrying their tools in backpacks weighing over 80 pounds.

Anyone wanting to reach the school site from the south must take a rugged jeep road to its terminus in Sarhad and then travel two days on foot or horseback.

All the cement, wood, glass and metal sheeting for the school must be trucked for days through Tajikistan, entering the Wakhan Corridor on a treacherous Soviet tank road to the northeast. The Tajik police guards often close the border, and truck drivers demand a high fee for tackling the sketchy tank trail.

The rounded river rocks being used for the foundation and walls are the only building materials available in Bozoi Gombad, and it takes a tremendous effort and a strong back to transform them into a usable form.

Nak Bak Shah digs rocks from the old Soviet military base. Mohammad Ali and Jaffar Ullah then transport the loads by wheelbarrow 100 yards to the school site. Then Mullah Rozi and Mehman Shah start pounding them into blocks.

Sarfraz Khan, 51, the CAI program director who oversees projects in the Wakhan and Azad Kashmir in Pakistan, is the engine driving CAI’s work in the corridor. He started working for CAI in 2002, and possesses the perfect combination of personal connections, skills and energy for the job.

It took Khan two years of meetings with Kyrgyz commander Abdul Rashid Khan and community leaders to decide on the location, size and the type of school that would mesh with their traditional, nomadic lifestyle.

When the school opens in 2009 it will be the first one in the remote Pamir, and the type of project that typifies CAI’s mission: a community-directed school that promotes girl’s education in an area overlooked by the government and other international aid organizations.
ISHKASHIM, Afghanistan — Atop a hill overlooking the town with the rolling green irrigated fields below, an army of laborers carry cement blocks on their backs to the construction site of a new girls' high school.

Nearby, other laborers mix cement and pour it into forms as fast as the cured blocks can be carried away.

The project, employing 40 workers, will result in the Ishkashim Girls' High School, the largest of the 14 Central Asia Institute schools in Afghanistan's northeast province of Badakhshan. CAI's executive director, Greg Mortenson, was here in August 2008 to lay the ceremonial cornerstone.

"The hilltop school vantage is stunning," Mortenson says, "with the towering Pamir range to the north, the rugged Hindu Kush mountains to the south. And it's amplified by the hope and joy the young women have to be able to realize their life-long dream of education."

Once it is complete in March 2009, the $68,000, 14-classroom high school, grades seven through 10, will operate two shifts of students each day, accommodating up to 1,800 girls, double the capacity of the government school the students now attend.

Education in the Wakhan

New schools in remote northern Afghanistan give hope to poorest of the poor

A group of women surrounds Greg Mortenson as he signs a contract to build a women's vocational center in Ishkashim.
But the need doesn’t end here. Everywhere he goes in the Wakhan Corridor, Mortenson is besieged by requests for schools, water projects and women’s vocational centers.

During this August visit, he is approached by Mohammad Hawfiz, who brings line drawings of a proposed water project for the area. The project has been denied by other aid agencies, but Mortenson says CAI will help, knowing that the $2,941 investment will provide clean water and prevent scores of infants from dying of dysentery every year.

However, as part of the deal, Mortenson insists that the water pipeline extend to the new school.

He also says yes to a new women’s vocational center near the high school. The center will provide a place for women to create and sell crafts, and a place for adult literacy classes.

After consulting with community elders, there’s another yes, this time for a co-ed primary school to be built on the site where the mujahadeen resistance leader Gen. Ahmad Shah Massoud, who understood the power of education, built his first school in neighboring Takhar Province. Before Massoud opened his first guerilla training camp, he had his militia build a school, saying, “Before we give our men guns to fight, we must give our children pencils and education, because that is where the real battle will be won.”

By the time he’s done, Mortenson has added these three projects to about a dozen others his staff will carry out in 2009 in Badakhshan.

None of these projects would be possible without the consent and support of the government, local Islamic clerics and Wohid Khan, the conservative Sunni commandant who holds the reins of power in Badakhshan.

Officially, Khan is chief of the Border Security Force, responsible for securing the 845-mile-long perimeter of his province where child trafficking and drug smuggling are common crimes.

Unofficially, Khan is responsible for the welfare of every resident of Badakhshan.

People in the west call such people warlords, and it is true that he commands his own loyal militia through an arrangement with the Afghan government. But it is also true that much of his time is spent performing social work: helping CAI and other nongovernmental organizations by ensuring that contractors are paid and supplies reach their destination; and helping the United Nations World Food Program, making sure its aid is delivered to the hungry.

Khan has taken on a Herculean task, considering the level of poverty in the Wakhan. It’s the poorest district in one of the poorest provinces in Afghanistan, which ranks in the top five of the world’s poorest nations.

The arid land produces meager crops that villagers harvest by hand with a sickle. More than 90 percent of people are subsistence farmers, but are unable to grow enough food to feed their families, according to a Wakhan Development Partnership report. Most households own animals, but almost everyone relies on outside food aid, and malnutrition and starvation are serious problems.
Inadequate food can lead to related health problems, as it does in Wargeant, a village where 16 of its nearly 700 residents suffer from some type crippling paralysis. At least three have been diagnosed with polio, a disease that UNICEF once declared eradicated. The others became crippled from eating bread made from the cow pea, *lathyris sativis*, which is substituted for flour when grain harvests fail. It contains a neurotoxin that causes a permanent spastic paralysis.

Medical care is virtually nonexistent, with the closest hospital a two-day drive on a rugged road. The international aid organization Oxfam reports that the number of women who die during childbirth in the province is the highest in the world at 6,500 per 100,000 live births, compared to 11 per 100,000 in the United States.

Like Khan, CAI has its work cut out for it. Literacy in the Wakhan hovers around 14 percent for men and 2 percent for women, and the rates drop further as one travels east up the corridor.

Changing those numbers will take patience and vigilance, but CAI plans to provide education and ongoing community-directed support for the people of the Wakhan far into the future.

As commandhan of Badakhshan, Wohid Khan is responsible for the welfare of everyone in his province.
Mohammad Zaman and his mine-sniffing dog, Pugi, search for landmines south of Kabul in the hot July sun.

KABUL, Afghanistan — Rocks painted red and white match the rows of flags that disrupt the dun-colored plain where handler Mohammad Zaman and his mine-sniffing dog, Pugi, work on the southern edge of the city. White signifies an area has been cleared of mines. Red means danger.

The crew of 25 deminers toils in the hot sun on July 30, 2008, making the area safe for city’s growing population.

On signal, Pugi trots out in a straight line, past the red rocks, nose to the ground, to the end of her 50-foot leash, turns around and trots immediately back to Zaman, sniffing the whole time. After a few moments of praise for Pugi, Zaman moves a few feet to his right, staying behind the white flags, and Pugi repeats her ground-sniffing trot into the danger zone.

Should Pugi smell something suspicious, she would immediately sit down, the area would be marked with red flags, and a deminer with tools ranging from a metal detector to a fine brush would be called in to carefully unearth the object.

The crew has cleared 13,300 square meters, or a little over a square kilometer, in a month, and has found two anti-tank landmines, one anti-personnel landmine and five bullets. It’s tedious work.

Landmines continue to wreak havoc, cause devastation in Afghanistan.

Deminer Fazil Haq digs gingerly as he searches for a landmine in a former battlefield on the edge of Kabul.
According to an April 2007 report by the Afghan government, the highest concentration of mines is in eastern Afghanistan and around Kabul, the world’s most heavily mined capital city. Mines and “explosive remnants of war,” called ERWs, left over from the Soviet invasion and the ensuing civil war are not the only source of danger.

The United States-led war to oust the Taliban in 2001 added at least 12,400 unexploded ordnance from its use of cluster bombs, Human Rights Watch reports. These “bomblets,” or BLUs, have become deadly de facto landmines. In Heart, Afghanistan, from 2001 to June 2002, BLUs killed 44 percent of victims, compared to a 22 percent death rate for landmine victims.

These yellow, cylindrical BLUs measure 6-1/2 inches high and, because the U.S. military dropped emergency food parcels of the same color, are an especially insidious association for children. Sixty-nine percent of BLU victims were under 18, according to Human Rights Watch. A blast from one BLU can injure people 500 feet away.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines has also received reports of the Taliban laying down new mines in anticipation of NATO offensives.

In the past 20 years, more than 70,000 Afghans have been killed or injured by landmines or ERWs, according to the UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan. About 60 Afghan civilian casualties are added to the list every month.

The UN reports that children suffer disproportionate numbers of landmine and ERW deaths and injuries because their natural curiosity makes them more likely to touch an unfamiliar object, and their smaller size makes them less able to withstand injury and blood loss.

UNMACA reports that between 1999 and 2006, 59 percent of landmine and ERW casualties were people under 21 years old, with boys between 7 and 14 suffering the largest proportion of death and injury. Boys typically are responsible for tending animals and collecting wood and water, which increases their vulnerability, but handling or tampering with the explosives is the most common cause of death or injury.

In attempt to avert future casualties, nine organizations in Afghanistan conduct mine-risk education programs, according to ICBL. Teams of landmine educators reach over 1 million people a year, traveling to high-risk communities for several days at a time to provide safety information.

The program appears to be effective; only 3 percent of landmine casualties in 2006 had received mine risk education, according to the ICBL.

In hazardous areas, Central Asia Institute incorporates a landmine awareness program into its schools in an attempt to protect its students.

Kids can learn more about landmines at this link: http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/sds/introduction/index.asp
Then, on a June 2005 afternoon Ahmad's life changed forever. Gulmarjan was herding goats with a friend in the Lander cemetery just 200 yards from the new CAI school when an old Soviet landmine exploded, killing him and seriously injuring his friend.

The boy was buried at the site where he died. Colorful prayer flags attached to wood poles and anchored in the casing of a Russian artillery shell now mark the spot. Grieving consumed all of Ahmad's energy for several months. He had previously lost one son to a childhood illness, and his high hopes for his remaining son were buried beneath that memorial in the Lander cemetery.

Ahmad fell into a deep depression, rarely leaving his house or speaking.

But when the deep sorrow finally loosened its grip, Ahmad decided to turn his grief into action and vowed to rid his valley of landmines.

He moved to Kabul, scraped together $3,000 to pay the required fee, and trained for a year with OMAR, a nonprofit demining agency.

On his days off, he returned to his village to scour the brown hillsides for mines. He removed and defused more than 300 mines, and created safe areas where people in the valley now walk and herd their animals.

For some, however, his efforts came too late. According to CAI's Karimi, more than 10 villagers in Char Asib Valley have been killed by landmines since 2001, and one CAI student, 8-year-old Jan Bibi, lost the fingers on her right hand.

Following his training, Ahmad began a new career with the help of connections through CAI. He works for RONCO Consulting Corp., traveling around Afghanistan clearing mines. The job pays $500 a month — good wages by Afghan standards — but is extremely dangerous. The UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan reports that since 1989, 860 deminers have been killed or disabled.

Far more dangerous, however, are Taliban attacks, which killed 11 people in Ahmad's company last year near Khost and Herat. RONCO has contracts to clear areas for the coalition forces, so its crews are targets for Taliban fire.

Ahmad said he knows the risks of his profession, but he is willing to sacrifice himself to rid his country of landmines, and to spare families the tragedy that has defined his life.

His work takes him far from home and leaves little time for him to continue defusing mines in his valley on his own, but he still holds out hope.

"My goal," he says, "is to find the money to bring my demining crew to Lander so that we can clean all of the mines near the village," he said. "It will cost about $24,000, and it will take at least six months. But if we are able to accomplish this goal, then no one else in this area will suffer the fate of my son."

Ahmad keeps a well-worn album with photos of his son. Pictures of the eager schoolboy are displayed next to haunting images of Gulmarjan's mortal injuries, his torso ripped open by a landmine planted before his birth.

Wordless, yet with a look of deep sadness and steely determination, Ahmad points to a final photo of his son wrapped in a white burial shroud.
Building bridges of peace, one penny at a time

STORY BY KARIN RONNOW

Greg Mortenson spends a lot of time and energy racing from one speaking engagement to the next on his book tour, but his favorite moments on the road are those he gets to spend with students.

While there may be reporters and “important people” waiting in the wings, Mortenson, director of the Central Asia Institute, always takes the time to answer every child’s question and shake every little hand.

“If the children are very young, he’ll get on the floor with them and talk about what life is like for them, and what they learned by participating in Pennies for Peace,” said Christiane Leitinger, director of Pennies for Peace, CAI’s outreach program for students.

“If they are older, he encourages them to learn about the world and frequently engages in meaningful discussions about the value of education and what it will take to eradicate illiteracy on a global level,” she said.

Nourished by such efforts, as well as the tremendous popularity of Mortenson’s book, “Three Cups of Tea,” and Leitinger’s ever-expanding outreach network, CAI’s Pennies for Peace grew 10-fold in the past year.

Tens of thousands of children on all continents except Antarctica collectively raised more than $900,000 in 2008 – one penny at a time — to help CAI build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pennies for Peace is most often conducted in schools. Yet the Scout troops, faith groups, businesses, home-school groups, family reunions and 4-H groups that also participate are proof that the program isn’t restricted to classrooms.

“Pennies for Peace resonates deeply with children and adults around the world,” Leitinger said. “You name it, and people have found a way to incorporate Pennies for Peace into what they do.”

Teaching tool

But Pennies for Peace — or “P4P,” as it is affectionately known — isn’t just about raising money. It is intended to also broaden students’ cultural horizons and teach them about their ability to help create change and build bridges in the global community.

“Teachers are often looking for a way to educate their students about a part of the world that many students may not be able to find on a map,” said Leitinger, who is based in Evergreen, Colo. “As they participate in Pennies for Peace, children gain a broader understanding of Pakistan and Afghanistan.”

Children also learn about their abilities to effect global change as philanthropists, how they can make a positive impact on a global scale, one penny at a time, and the rewards of sharing and working together to bring hope and education to other children half a world away.

“The problems of the world often seem insurmountable, even for governments and organizations with great resources. But with Pennies for Peace, people find that they can impact important world issues — poverty and lack of education — through something that most people consider valueless: a penny.”

As Mortenson often says, a penny in the United States is virtually worthless. But in the developing world, a penny buys a pencil and opens the door to literacy.

Building a toolkit

As the campaign has grown, Leitinger and Mortenson have looked for new and different ways to help teachers and community groups use Pennies for Peace.

In January 2009, simultaneous with publication of a Young Readers’ version of “Three Cups of Tea,” CAI will debut a new Pennies for Peace Toolkit. The online resource, made possible with support from the National Education Association Foundation and the Pearson Foundation, will be available to any program that registers to participate.

The toolkit includes a K-12 curriculum linked to national standards and an assessment tool. It contains a reference list, fact sheets, a sample letter for parents and sample press releases; printable stickers, postcards, poster components and maps; and a Pennies for Peace DVD narrated by Mortenson’s daughter, Amira.

The online nature of the toolkit will make it accessible to schools around the world, and reduce the resources that CAI must dedicate to the tremendous volume of Pennies for Peace-related mailings.

Peaceful world

Pennies for Peace was inspired by students at Westside Elementary School in River Falls, Wis. Mortenson’s mother, Jerene, was principal at the school and invited her son to talk about his efforts overseas. His story prompted the students to collect thousands of one-cent pieces through a program they called “Pennies For Pakistan.”

That was in 1994. Since then, the program has grown to include more than 3,000 schools, organizations and individual efforts.

In October, 2008, Leitinger visited Westside Elementary with a film crew to document the origins of Pennies for Peace. They interviewed Jerene Mortenson and the original students and teachers who participated.
“It was an amazing experience to talk with those folks,” Leitinger said. “They never dreamed about where P4P would go, all they wanted back then was to help their kids understand the world, and for them to see beyond the lovely rolling hills of Wisconsin.

“One of the original students who participated, Jaime, has even changed her major in college to sociology and social work and hopes eventually to find work in a service organization,” she said. The program’s success is in large part due to a collective understanding that the best hope for a peaceful and prosperous world lies in the education of all the world’s children. Pennies for Peace encourages American children, ultimately our future leaders, to be active participants in the movement toward that reality.

And for the children of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the program brings lasting hope. “More than anything, Greg hopes that Pennies for Peace will awaken the budding capacity in all children to see that they have the ability to understand differences and commonalities in the world, and to instill in them the belief that when problems arise, they have the power to create the solution,” Leitinger said.

For more information, visit www.pen-niesforpeace.org, or contact Leitinger at info@penniesforpeace.org, or write P.O. Box 7209, Bozeman, MT 59771 or call 406-585-7841.

“The problems of the world often seem insurmountable, even for governments and organizations with great resources. But with Pennies for Peace, people find that they can impact important world issues — poverty and lack of education — through something that most people consider valueless: a penny.”
BOZEMAN, Mont. — Central Asia Institute’s headquarters is an unassuming space in a new office building at the far eastern edge of the city’s downtown. Black-and-white photographs of Pakistan and Afghanistan children line the walls. There’s a reception area, three private offices, a small kitchen area and a storage room filled to capacity with copies of “Three Cups of Tea” in several languages and piles of other printed material.

While this all sounds rather sedate, it’s not. The CAI headquarters is a really busy place. The phone rings off the hook. The e-mail inbox and traditional mailbox overflow with questions, donations and accolades for the organization and its founder, Greg Mortenson. The staff members are on a first name basis with the Fed-Ex, UPS and U.S. Postal Service delivery folks.

And it’s been this crazy for nearly two years.

“The response and growth has been phenomenal since the release of the paperback edition of “Three Cups of Tea” in January 2007,” said Jennifer Sipes, CAI’s director of operations. “I began work at CAI in 2005. In the past three years, it has grown significantly. The response from our supporters has been incredible.”

CAI’s membership exploded, too, growing from 8,400 in 2005 to 68,000 this year.

All that growth has made an enormous difference in the workflow at CAI’s Bozeman office, said Sipes, who manages daily operations and staff.

CAI has eight employees stateside. Five of them work in the Bozeman office. In addition to Sipes, the office staff includes Laura Andersen, public relations manager; Michelle Laxson, database manager; Lynsie Gettel and Lindsay Glick, the administrative assistants.

“Going from one person in the office to five has had a huge impact,” Sipes said. “They are all truly amazing and have helped significantly. We all work as a team, and rely on each other. I definitely couldn’t do this by myself anymore.”

The hardest part of working in the office, Sipes said, “is that everyone wants time with Greg. To tell people that his schedule doesn’t allow for that is difficult — they read the book and still imagine him in the small basement office, handwriting letters. People are disappointed to hear that things have changed, but when we explain it, they understand, and continue to call Greg their hero. If we could just clone him, it would be great!”

Mortenson doesn’t work in the office much, in part because he’s on the road much of the time these days. In the first eight months of 2008, he traveled twice to Pakistan and Afghanistan, gave more than 400 talks in 140 cities, and participated in some 350 radio, television or newspaper interviews.

In addition to all the on-the-road talking and fundraising, he manages CAI’s overseas staff, and handles all media requests for interviews and photos.

And last but certainly not least, there are three other CAI staffers who don’t work in the Bozeman office.

Christiane Leitinger, based in Evergreen, Colo., is director of the Pennies for Peace program. Genevieve Chabot, based in Bozeman, Mont., is the international program manager. And Sadia Ashraf, based in Chicago, Ill., is the outreach and special events manager.

And they, too, spend a lot of time answering questions.

Turns out, the most common questions they’re all fielding at this stage of the game are: Can Greg come and speak? What’s happened since the book? And, are CAI’s schools being bombed?

And the answers are, respectively: Maybe, depends on when you want him. We’ll send you copies of the “Journey of Hope” publication. And, no, peaceful endeavors done well, like CAI’s schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, tend to be well defended by the people they are meant to help.

Continued on next page
CAI merchandise

2009 calendar available now; ‘Three Cups of Tea’ available in young-adult version in 2009

► THREE CUPS

Countless book clubs and church groups chose “Three Cups of Tea” as a book to read and discuss, and the book was adopted and promoted by nearly 200 One Book community-read programs across the country.

Also, more than 400 high schools and 56 colleges and universities in the United States have adopted “Three Cups of Tea” as required reading for students; and New Hampshire educators aim to have every high school student in that state read the book this year.

For more information, see threecupssoftea.com, or visit these other international book sites: Brazil, in Portuguese, at www.terceiraxicara.com.br; Israel, in Hebrew, at www.3kosot.com; Italy, at www.tretazzedite.it; or Turkey, www.obichim.com/ucfinancay.


“The young reader’s edition of the worldwide bestseller ‘Three Cups of Tea’ has been specially adapted to bring this remarkable story of humanitarianism up to date. It includes brand new photos, maps and illustrations, as well as a special afterword by Greg’s 12-year-old daughter, Amira, who has traveled with her father as an advocate for the Pennies for Peace program for children.”

— Penguin promotional material

In addition, Penguin is releasing an audio CD version of the young-adult book. The introduction is read by actress Vanessa Redgrave and the book is read by actress Leoni Atossa. An Iranian who grew up in Germany and now lives in Los Angeles, Atossa starred in the movie “Kite Runner.”

Nonfiction picture book, ages 6-8, Spring 2009 release


“This remarkable story can now inspire the youngest readers.”

— Publisher’s promotional material

“Greg Mortenson stumbled, lost and delirious, into a remote Himalayan village after a failed climb up K2. The villagers saved his life, and he vowed to return and build them a school. The remarkable story of his promise kept is now perfect for reading aloud. Told in the voice of Korph’s children, this story illuminates the humanity and culture of a relevant and distant part of the world in gorgeous collage, while sharing a riveting example of how one person can change thousands of lives.”

— Publisher’s promotional material

2009 Central Asia Institute Calendar. Photos by Deirdre Eitel ($10, Central Asia Institute). The photos in the 2009 calendar focus on CAI’s projects in Afganistan, specifically in the Wakhan and Pamir, which serve a largely illiterate and extremely poor population. The photos were all taken in the summer of 2008. All proceeds directly benefit CAI. To purchase, visit www.ikat.org or call 406-585-7841.

Outside magazine’s December 2008 issue includes a feature story about CAI and Greg Mortenson, written by Kevin Fedarko, who has traveled with Mortenson in Pakistan and Afghanistan three times. He previously wrote about K2 and the Siachen Border conflict for the magazine. Available on newsstands in November.

“Three Cups of Tea is one of the most remarkable adventure stories of our time … (and) proof that one ordinary person, with the right combination of character and determination, really can change the world.”

— TOM BROKAW, who made the first $100 donation to Mortenson’s effort in 1993.

BUY A BOOK, BUILD A SCHOOL

Purchase any of these three titles at your local bookstore, or visit www.threecupssoftea.com and, if you click for an online purchase, Amazon will donate about 7 percent of all your book purchases (all books, anytime) to CAI.
KARIN RONNOW, 46, is assistant managing editor at the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, where she has worked for 12 years. She earned her undergraduate degree in urban studies and journalism from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn., and master’s degree in journalism from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism in Evanston, Ill. Prior to joining the Chronicle, she was a reporter for daily newspapers in Maine and Georgia, a business reporter for Lafferty Publications in Dublin, Ireland, and managing editor of the Livingston Enterprise. She lives in Livingston with her husband, Kimball Leighton, and a yellow Lab named Darwin. Their daughter, Carmine, is a senior at the University of Montana. Karin can be reached at kронnow@gmail.com

DEIRDRE EITEL, 45, worked as a photographer at the Bozeman Daily Chronicle from 1995 until her unexpected death in October 2008. She earned her undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of Montana in Missoula, and took numerous photojournalism courses during her one year at Western Kentucky University. She worked as a firefighter, Nordic ski instructor and photographer for the Salt Lake Tribune in Utah prior to joining the Chronicle. She is survived by her husband, Tom Eitel, and children Morgan, 11, and Pipi, 9. This publication is dedicated to her.

HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE...

Central Asia Institute
P.O. Box 7209
Bozeman, MT 59771
406.585.7841
www.ikat.org

Since 1996, Central Asia Institute’s mission has been to promote education and literacy, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Also of late 2008, CAI had established 78 schools, educating more than 28,000 students, including 14,000 girls. CAI is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, federal IRS EIN # 51-0376237.

Pennies for Peace
P.O. Box 7209
Bozeman, MT 59771
406.585.7841
www.penniesforpeace.org

Pennies for Peace, or P4P, was conceived by students and teachers at Westside Elementary School in River Falls, Wis. Originally called Pennies For Pakistan, it was renamed in 1996. Since then over 100 million pennies have been raised by over 2,900 schools all over the world.

P4P is designed to educate children about the world beyond their experience and show them that they can make a positive impact on a global scale, one penny at a time. Through cross-cultural understanding and a solution-oriented approach, P4P encourages children, ultimately our future leaders, to be active participants in global peace.
CAI would like to thank the Bozeman Chronicle for assisting with this publication.