

Outreach to Teach

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg



A B C D E
F G H I J
K L M N O
P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z

Photos—Capt. Ray Geoffroy Story—TSgt Shawn McCowan Video—SSgt Neal Uranga

A year ago, a group of volunteers turned a burned-out restaurant on Bagram Airfield into a one-room classroom, and invited area school-age children to learn math, reading, and writing.

When the first “Cat in the Hat” class graduated in August, 40 area Afghan children had taken huge steps toward literacy. A new volunteer staff recently began a new school year with hopes for an even more successful program with more help for the children than any other Bagram program.

Army Capt. Shannon Johnson manages prisoner processing at Bagram Airfield. While her duty is important in many ways, she wanted to make a different kind of positive difference during her tour.

Johnson became one of the program directors and immediately began plans to expand it as much as possible. Johnson started accepting more volunteers, and turned a storage area into another classroom.

She met with local Afghan school headmasters to determine if there was more interest from families with children in the local area.

Before long, she got her answer; the

program doubled its size to 80 students within a month. During its first year, the “Cat in the Hat” program taught local children the English alphabet, basic reading, and counting skills. But Johnson expanded the curriculum to include more advanced reading comprehension and basic math.

She said the program’s results were immediately obvious.

“Literacy of new students here seems to be at about the first grade level with normal verbal skills. When the last class graduated they showed a third and fourth grade literacy level, all in one year,” said Johnson.

Johnson says her vision for the program is to benefit the “whole child,” and her intent is to benefit the children beyond the classroom desk.

She plans to further develop the curriculum with geography, allowing students to learn countries, continents, and simple earth



Capt. Angela Joy –Radden and a student count together.

science, so the students better understand the world around them.

She’d like the children to identify where they live globally as well as where America and other coalition nations are, helping them understand they have had support from people all over the world.

Johnson also introduced oral hygiene orientation, where the students are taught how to brush their teeth. Toothbrushes and toothpaste for each member of the students’ family are then sent home. She also stockpiled hundreds of donated coats, hats, scarves, gloves, and boots. The volunteers will distribute sets of the winter

More photos [HERE](#) — Full story [HERE](#) — Video [HERE](#)

garments at the first sign of cold weather. Her last endeavor was to create a “fuel donut.” She and her duty station co-workers use some of their off-duty time to press recycled paper, sawdust, and water into a light weight, donut-shaped fire logs. Once completed, the logs are given to children to take home during the winter.

“In many of their homes in the winter, they have to choose between keeping warm and eating. These donuts provide their whole family with a more comfortable winter.”

While students’ new skills may make them more marketable for jobs in their adulthood, and winter clothes can protect them from cold Afghanistan winters, Johnson believes the program is just as beneficial for the volunteers.

“Out here in Afghanistan, this is the one day we get to see something different than a war going on around them. They get to see they made a difference and helped these kids,” said Johnson

Volunteers were quick to agree.

Capt. Angela Joy-Radden, who leads the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing’s weather team, began volunteering in the program soon after she arrived at Bagram. She attributes the program’s success to the satisfaction both students and staff get from their time together.



A student draws a picture during an arts and crafts project.

“It brings a lot of joy to my heart, being able to interact with the children. Like seeing small successes when their face lights up when they get something right,” said Joy-Radden.

“I hope they see that we genuinely care. We want to interact with them in a kind

way, so they see we have the best intentions. We get down to their level, on our knees, and try to do our best to help them learn. That interaction is priceless.”

Joy-Radden has seen several students begin to change the way they respond to Americans and military members.

“I was working with a little girl on writing and naming numbers. She suddenly started responding to me in her language, sharing with me how she says the numbers. She started teaching me while I’m teaching her. There was also a boy who was very quiet, shy, and standoffish at first. Now that he’s gotten used to me and seen the dedication and commitment, he’s smiling, joking, and working harder.”

Capt. Rachel Seablom, assigned to the 455 AEW’s 774th Airlift Squadron, is another volunteer who sees the benefits from the partnership for both teacher and student.

“They light up when we work together. It’s the best part of my week, getting the positive feedback from the kids. It’s fun to



A local student counts with Capt. Rachel Seablom.

see the kids progress from where they started, and how they change over the months. In the end, I hope they take home that people here want to help them, and are friendly. They see us here in our military uniforms, and know that we're a friendly presence," said Seablom.

Several volunteers give their time in other ways besides teaching. A handful of artistic servicemembers have painstakingly painted nearly every wall in the Language Arts Center, adorning most of the classroom wall with murals of Dr. Seuss-esque characters.

Tech. Sgt. Christopher Monroe is an Air Force electrical engineer assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-1.

He says he has a special appreciation for

the program, because part of his military duty includes assisting the transition of the engineering mission to Afghan control.

While volunteering at "Cat in the Hat," he both works with students and takes on maintenance needs at the facility.

Monroe's own son gives him another perspective on the possible long-term effects of the program.

"I have a child myself, and this is teaching me how to teach him. It really touches home when I'm with these kids.

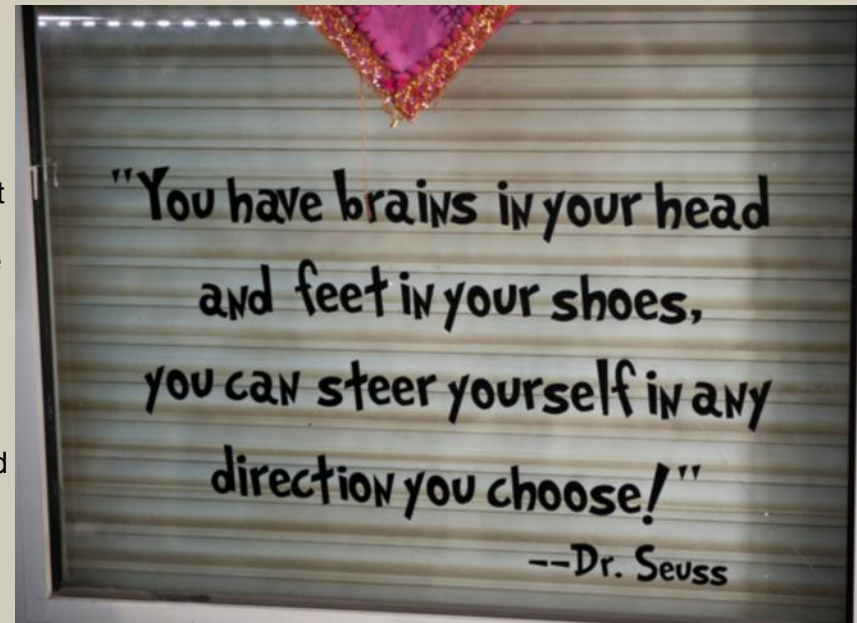
This program is extremely valuable because it gives the kids a different idea of what Americans are like. Our kids might someday meet these kids. This gives them a chance to see that Americans aren't as bad as they thought they were, because we taught them to read and count," said Monroe.

"Cat in the Hat" staff says the program

shows strong promise for even further growth. Before Captain Johnson completed her tour and returned to the United States in October, she began a third class and increased enrollment to 120 children.

Donations from families and groups in the United States continue to grow, so far keeping up with the increasing need for supplies. Students, their families, and local communities seem to have strongly embraced the efforts of the men and women reaching out to them.

Because more than 300 kids' names are on the waiting list for the next class.—



More photos [HERE](#) — Full story [HERE](#) — Video [HERE](#)



—To learn about the “Cat in the Hat” program, click [HERE](#)



“I think it’s a wonderful **commitment** to see that their families are supporting them... and that we as Soldiers, Airmen, Marines, and Sailors, we’re all out here **dedicating** ourselves to it as well.”

— U.S. Air Force Capt. Angela Joy-Radden, 455th Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron



“They light up. It’s the best part of my week, getting the positive feedback from the kids.”

— U.S. Air Force Capt. Rachel Seablom, 774th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron

“When we first get the kids, their literacy level is probably first grade on average... by the time we graduate the students we see them at a third to fourth grade level... it’s so rewarding for us to see that we’ve made a difference.”





—To learn about the “Cat in the Hat” program, click [HERE](#)

← END