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AFGHANISTAN

CASE STUDY

Deaf, But Not Silenced

Multimedia centers provide deaf Afghans with tools and skills to communicate.



Deaf student Ziaudeen learns how to call a family member through a Skype video call.

“Since I joined the Anaar center, I have learned how to communicate effectively using the Internet.” — Ziaudeen, Nangarhar

CHALLENGE In Afghanistan, a proliferation of mobile phones is dramatically changing how citizens across the country are communicating with one another. But for deaf Afghans, mobile phone usage is limited to SMS - a particular challenge when considering the fact that less than one-third of the population is literate. For many, communication has been limited to in-person interaction. Even for those who can read and write, conversations with far-away friends and family have been few and far between.

INITIATIVE At the Anaar Multimedia Center (MMC) in Jalalabad, run by the Afghan Amputee Bicyclists for Rehabilitation and Recreation (AABRAR), supported by Internews through the USAID-funded Afghan Civic Engagement Program, teamed up with a nearby organization serving Nangarhar’s deaf population to offer a series of trainings for deaf Afghans conducted entirely in sign language. Trainings included how to use basic computer software such as MS Word, how to search for information using Google, and, most critically for these deaf students, how to hold video calls on Skype.

RESULTS One such trainee, Ziaudeen, is a deaf student in Jalalabad. Though he is literate, these Anaar trainings have transformed his day-to-day life. Now, not only can he use MS Word to complete his school assignments and social networks to connect with his other Internet-savvy friends, but he can also hold real-time conversations with relatives over the Internet. “Since I joined the Anaar center,” he said, “I have learned how to use the Internet and communicate effectively through the Internet.” Although he does regularly use email for communication, he says, “most of the time I am using Skype video calls for communication with my classmates, teachers, and relatives.”

Naseema, the director of SERVE, which co-organized these trainings, said she is very impressed by the MMC, and plans to continue working with AABRAR to develop and lead further trainings to help deaf students and other disabled Afghans connect better with one another.