



A Little Woman Who Is Changing The Lives Of Afghan Girls

Back in 2006, when student Alaina Podmorow was only nine, she was inspired into action after attending a speech by a Canadian journalist and human rights activist named Sally Armstrong (see sidebar).

Her Inspiration

Alaina heard about the human rights violations that had happened to Afghan girls. Alaina could not believe there were girls in Afghanistan that did not experience the same rights and freedoms she lived with every day. She had become aware of an issue of which she'd previously been ignorant — the human rights violations inflicted upon girls and women in Afghanistan, a country in turmoil.

Rather than feeling powerless in the face of such injustice, the young girl from Kelowna, B.C. latched onto Armstrong's message that "the worst thing you can do is nothing." So Podmorow decided to do something.

Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan

In the spring of 2007, Alaina started Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan with twenty young girls who were similarly determined to change the world.

Her initial goal was to hold a potluck and auction to raise enough money for one teacher's salary for one year, which at the time was \$750. But she ended up with enough money to pay for four teachers for one year with the help of her friends, family and community.

Who Is Sally Armstrong?

An award winning author, journalist and human rights activist, Alaina's inspiration is also a three-time winner of the Amnesty International Canada media award; she holds numerous honorary degrees and is a member of the Order of Canada. Armstrong was the first journalist to bring the story of the women of Afghanistan to the world.



Source: <http://nsb.com/speakers/sally-armstrong/>



Pictured here: Girls fundraising and raising awareness about their organization and cause – the lack of equal access to education for girls and women in Afghanistan. (Image source: www.littlewomenforlittlewomen.com/what-we-do-0)

They have since raised over \$500,000 and started 10 other "Little" groups across North America. One hundred per cent of their funds are then allocated to education programs run by Canadian Women For Women in Afghanistan, an organization of adult women.

Trip to Afghanistan

Alaina realized her dream to travel to Afghanistan in the summer of 2012. Afghanistan is a country where only 36% of the people can read and write, where there are over 30 languages spoken, and where the life expectancy is only 46 years old. It was in this mountainous and desert country that Alaina experienced firsthand the hardships and challenges for girls and women, but more importantly she witnessed the successes of the projects that Little Women had been so passionately fundraising for since 2006 and the accomplishments that girls in Afghanistan were experiencing as a result.

"I needed to look into the faces of the women and girls who were attending school. I needed to see the change," said Podmorow, and what she saw was a glimpse into their dreams of the future. "We often forget just how powerful education, awareness, and understanding really is. When I was in Afghanistan, I saw girls light up with excitement and hope as they sat in their classrooms knowing that, indeed, they did matter, that they deserved to learn how to read and write, that they could contribute to the world and reach their full potential. It truly refueled my passion and commitment to continue this work until every woman and girl in Afghanistan has the opportunity to exercise their universal human rights, especially the right to an education. "

Afghanistan Fast Facts

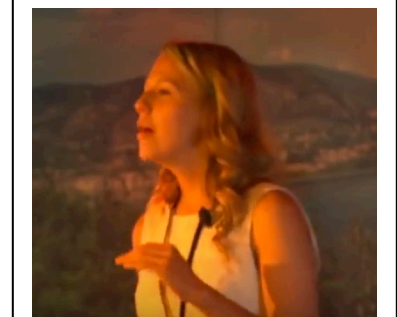


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| Population: | 29,929,000 |
| Capital: | Kabul; 2,956,000 |
| Area: | 652,090 square kilometers |
| Languages: | Pashtu, Afghan Persian (Dari), Uzbek, Turkmen, 30 minor languages |
| Religion: | Sunni and Shiite Muslim |
| Life Expectancy: | 46 |
| Literacy Percent: | 36 % |

Awards and Honours

Alaina's commitment over the years has been recognized with many awards and honours.

- 2008 - Me to We Award
- 2010 Huggable Hero Award
- 2011 - Certificate of Recognition for Outstanding Work in Support of Afghan Women and Girls (presented by the Honourable Bev Oda, Minister of International Cooperation)
- 2011 – Global Teen Leader for the We Are Family Foundation's (WAFF) Three Dot Dash Initiative
- 2011 - Invited to attend Just Peace Summit in the spring of 2011 in New York City
- 2011 - Top Teen Philanthropist in Canada
- 2012 - Speaker at TedX Kelowna
- Fall 2012 - BC Council for International Cooperation Global Initiative Award
- Fall 2012 - Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal
- Fall 2012, Honorary Youth Ambassador for the inaugural International Day of the Girl (IDG)
- 2015 – Top 20 Under 20 Community Service Impact Award



Alaina speaking about Little Women for Little Women at TedX Kelowna in 2012.

Alaina lives her life following her motto that "education = peace" and has become a recognized force for change. Although she considers herself a regular teenager who enjoys playing sports, singing and playing guitar with friends, she is more than that. She is someone who understands that the world beyond her own community needs help.

Alaina is more motivated than ever and vows to never stop fighting for Little Women and for Global equality in human rights. She continues to speak to audiences, sharing information about the importance of education as a key tool in peace building. The world is a better place thanks to inspired and inspiring humans like Alaina Podmorrow.

(Sources: <http://www.littlewomenforlittlewomen.com/who-we-are/about-alaina>, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/07/15/alaina-podmorrow-little-women_n_7802802.html, <http://plancanada.ca/top-20-under-20>)