



## High school students have chance to change Afghan education system

Local News

**Posted By Mark Spowart, Special to The Londoner**

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With the school year just around the corner, Morgan Shortt has a message she wants to deliver to 40,000 high school students.

Shortt, a program officer with the Canadian Rotary Collaboration for International Development (CRCID) is bringing "Afghanistan School.ca" to students across Canada this school year with the central message that Afghanistan "is not just a country of conflict, it is a country that houses a lifestyle, it is a country that houses family, and children and mothers, and aunts and uncles, and they are people who are just trying to live their lives," said Shortt.

"There are areas of Afghanistan that don't directly see the war or the conflict, and I think we forget that. We are always hearing about all the conflict that is going on and we forget that there is a real world going on there."

The Canadian Rotarian Centennial Afghanistan Challenge is a partnership between the Canadian Government and Rotary in Canada. Together they are building a fully-furnished school in Afghanistan that will accommodate 4,000 girls and boys in grades one through to 12. The students will attend the school in three separate shifts, with the girls attending in the morning shift and the boys attending in the other two.

The school that is 90 percent complete is being funded by Canadian Rotary Clubs who have been fundraising and to date have raised over \$270,000 and that will be matched by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) up to \$518,000.

Starting now and running throughout the school year small bracelets will be offered for sale with the money going to a legacy fund that will be used to purchase additional items for the school.



**Mark Spowart**

Morgan Shortt of the Canadian Rotary Collaboration for International Development models the Afghanistan School.ca bracelet that is available for sale to help raise funds that will form a legacy fund, for the school that is being built in Afghanistan.

"So if we make enough funds we will add things like sports equipment, a vegetable garden to help with meals, that sort of thing. Once we upgrade the school, if there are still funds left then we take the funds and move it into another Rotary school that is being built," said Shortt. "Either way it is going to go into the school system in Afghanistan. But it wasn't about the money for us. Going to high schools it was about getting the message out and having Canadian students understand and be more aware of what is going on in other countries. It was really important for us to bring that information out and sort raise awareness and that is our key point of running a huge public engagement campaign," added Shortt.

The program has been designed by CRCID which is headquartered here in London in partnership with Canadian Rotary clubs, Roberts Marketing of London and CIDA. The national program was launched last week at the London Music Club, and is clearly designed to appeal to high school students.

"Connie (Connie Roberts, President of Roberts Marketing) and I have spent a lot of time together designing this campaign, and we kind of went back to our youth to build the beginning stages of it. We took the draft of the campaign and ran it through a youth focus group, and they loved it, and we barely tweaked any of it afterwards. We continue to go back to the youth focus group as we tweak and adapt the campaign to fit the direction we are going and we go back to them, and they give us everything we need," said Shortt.

The program will start rolling out to schools across Canada around September 20. "We will be approaching superintendents of school boards and then we will be approaching the schools through them. We are also approaching the Canadian Rotarians, we are approaching many of the 750 Rotary clubs that are in Canada. We are engaging them and asking them if they have a school in their area, go and let them know, get involved, go and do a presentation. Or just go and talk to the teacher or principal in their area," said Shortt.

Teachers, students and other educators who are interested in the program, or want to sell the bracelets or arrange for a presentation in their school can go to <http://afghanistanschool.ca/> where you can register for a challenge to win one of 12 laptop computers.

"What I really want to see next June is that somehow we have changed the minds of Canadian students, I want to know that our campaign really paid off, and for the students in Afghanistan, because they study outside under trees. Afghanistan has such brutal winters and intense summers, it is exciting for us to give them somewhere to sit, some shelter," said Shortt.

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