



## PORTRAITS OF PROGRESS

### Hope Lives: Rahila



Rahila Rohullah is a prominent figure in the documentary *What Tomorrow Brings*. Rahila enrolled at the Zabuli Education Center as fifth grader—at the age of 18.

- **Seeking education, not just school:** Upon enrollment, Rahila was our oldest student. That didn't bother her, however. **Rahila had been attending a public school as an eighth grader with 120 classmates and wasn't learning anything.** She was deeply frustrated. On her own, Rahila decided to change schools. Three of her younger sisters also enrolled at the Zabuli Education Center. From the outset, Rahila was a model student: attentive, serious, helpful, and eager to learn. She dreamed of becoming a police officer with special training in human rights.
- **Fighting for agency:** As the malik, or mayor, of Deh'Subz, Rahila's father held considerable influence. His decision to send his own daughters to the Zabuli Education Center was a notable endorsement. But as detailed in *What Tomorrow Brings*, by the age of 23, Rahila had been in and out of the school for years. In ninth grade, Rahila fought with her family for six months when her father tried to beat and threaten her into marrying the 70-year-old father of a woman he wanted to marry himself. She resisted, despite a broken nose and broken ribs, finding at the Zabuli Education Center the comfort that allowed her to hold out until her father finally gave up. **"It's my own decision who I will marry, and I won't allow my parents to force me. It's every girl's right."**

- **Victory in a diploma:** Despite considerable odds, Rahila graduated from the Zabuli Education Center in 2016. Today, Rahila is preparing to start her second year of study at the Razia Jan Institute. **She is still neither married nor engaged.** (Rahila’s sister, who graduated from the Zabuli Education Center in December 2017, became engaged shortly before graduation and seems to be excited about her betrothal.) Rahila has determined that she isn’t tall enough to pursue the criminal justice path she once dreamed about. But she’s already adjusted and is busily planning her next academic steps.

## The Birth of a Vocation: Uzma



**Uzma Azami enrolled at the Zabuli Education Center in 2008 as a fourth grader.** As a high school student, Uzma said she wanted to become a doctor so that she could serve her people. After graduating from the Zabuli Education Center in 2016, Uzma enrolled in the 2017 inaugural class at the Razia Jan Institute.

- **Family support:** Today, Uzma’s family proudly refers to her as “Miss Midwife.” **Uzma’s family supports her focus and success.** To ensure that Uzma has sufficient time for homework, her household chores have been reassigned. “Now, my mother, sisters, and brothers—they don’t let me do any housework. They tell me to study. They say, ‘Just pay attention to your studies.’ They even respect me a little more. They are proud of me, because I am the only one in my family to graduate.”
- **From dream to reality:** Uzma is so excited. “I’m the first person in my family that’s studying in university. I couldn’t be prouder,” Uzma says. She’s halfway through her degree program and on the cusp of this next phase of her life; ever closer to **realizing her dream of bringing medical care to her community.**
- **Meaningful mentorship:** As filmmaker and Razia’s Ray of Hope board member Beth Murphy observed during a December 2017 visit to Deh’Subz, “The male doctor who trains RJI students at the health clinic is a real mentor. He’s encouraging, friendly, and respectful. **This is the first time they’ve had a male mentor, so this is a big deal. It’s amazing to see them interacting at this level.** He seems truly invested. It’s such a positive experience for everyone.”

- **Power of midwifery:** Midwifery is a respected profession in Afghanistan. Midwives provide an array of simple health services in addition to providing prenatal care, delivering babies, and caring for neonates and postpartum mothers. Community members are beginning to pay for basic care services—and even a small payment can have a significant impact. **In time, Razia Jan Institute students will take their places as esteemed medical providers—and leaders—in the community.** Uzma sees that this potential is not just a blurry aspiration; she is doing the work and creating a future she wants.
- **Delivering hope:** A subset of RJI students were allowed by their families to spend an overnight shift in maternity at the nearest hospital. When the students returned to Deh’Subz the next morning, they were overflowing with joy. They had attended a whopping 11 deliveries—commonly ascribed to the full moon—all with first-time mothers. Razia Jan was moved to tears. “They were so happy,” Razia recalls. “They said, **‘We had such a great time delivering all those babies!’** It’s a joy for them, to really do and experience what they’ve been training to do for a year. It’s becoming real, and they are so excited.”

## **New Life, New Rules: Shaima**



“One of my best school memories is when I got married in 2014 and then came to Deh’Subz from the city. I didn’t think there would be a school for girls. My husband brought me to the Zabuli Education Center to enroll, but they didn’t admit me because I am married. I was so disappointed. After a few days, Razia Jan informed us that I would be allowed to enroll. I was so happy. I will never forget those moments. Meanwhile, after graduation I want to continue my education at the Razia Jan Institute. Although now I am pregnant and my baby girl will be born in December.” —*Shaima Azima, September 2017*

**Shaima came to the Zabuli Education Center at the age of 22, at which point she had been married for nearly two years.**

**Before Shaima married Habeeb, she made him promise that she’d be able to finish high school.** He kept his promise. In fact, it was his lobbying on her behalf that won Shaima a spot in grade 10 at the Zabuli Education Center, where her favorite subjects were English and biology.

Habeeb graduated from Kabul University with a degree in engineering. He works for Shamshad TV network. **“I’m very proud my wife is educated,”** Habeeb says. “Not many men can say that here.” Without not only the support of her husband but also the support of her in-laws, Shaima would not have been able to complete her education.

In December 2017, shortly before graduation, she gave birth to the couple’s first child. “Many girls don’t have the chance to study, especially after they get married and have a baby,” she said. **“I’m lucky. I hope and pray there will be more like me.”**

In addition to being a “good mom,” Shaima harbors dreams of becoming a doctor and serving her family and society.



*Shaima and Habeeb at Graduation, December*