



Women Inspired  
**NEWSLETTER**

**LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS**

Women in Afghanistan are living under some of the most difficult circumstances in the world. Violence and discrimination against women and girls has sharply increased across the country. Women are not allowed to attend school, go to work, or sometimes even be in public places. Freedom and independence have faded.



*Photo Via Gallup*

Through an incredibly bold partner, SowHope recently funded a project that was, surprisingly, allowed by the Taliban. The project has so far helped 120 Afghan women join commercial cooperatives where they receive vocational training, counseling, and a stipend while they learn a skill. Before the project, most of the women earned on average about \$10 a month, mostly by begging. Now the women report earnings of 3 to 10 times their original income.

The group and individual counseling provided by this project have been crucial. One woman, Nagin, who came from a poor family, faced gender-based violence in her home. As a child she was not allowed to go outside of her home. She took care of 6 younger brothers, so she was never able to attend school.

Married for 13 years, Nagin wasn't able to get pregnant. Her husband would not support her to get medical help to have a child and her father-in-law treated her horribly. She asked her brothers for support, but they didn't respond. She had a strong desire to have a child, so she adopted a baby boy, whom she loved as her own. Her husband, however, would not support them, and Nagin felt hopeless as no one seemed to care about her.

Nagin found hope when she joined a SowHope-funded tailoring cooperative and learned to sew. She also attended the counseling sessions which gave her tools to address her psychological struggles. She found comfort from meeting with other women. Nagin went from earning \$10 a month from begging to making \$75 a month selling clothes that she makes. Now she can send her son to school and provide for their basic needs. Nagin expressed her gratitude for this project which gave her skills, income, hope, and a promising future, ultimately restoring her sense of dignity.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting projects that change the lives of women like Nagin.

**INSPIRING CHANGE THROUGH FARMING**



*From left to right, partner Victoria, Mary, and Sylvia*

SOWHOPE  
EXISTS  
TO INSPIRE  
WOMEN AROUND  
THE WORLD  
BY PROMOTING  
WELLNESS,  
EDUCATION, AND  
ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITIES

In 2019, SowHope began partnering with Victoria, local leader in Sierra Leone, who has championed opportunities in agriculture for women in slum villages around a major city. As a young woman, Victoria was a victim of an early arranged marriage which caused her a lot of pain. As a result, she decided to start an organization to help women and children at risk.

Over the past four and a half years, SowHope has funded five of Victoria's projects, impacting 600 women. Last November, a team from SowHope visited Sierra Leone to witness some of these projects. The team met a group of women who were displaced from their homes due to flooding and resulting mudslides. The government relocated them to slums in the outskirts of town. The women, mostly widows, had no means of making a living until they heard about Victoria and her projects helping women.

Together, the women were able to buy a piece of land which they now use to grow a variety of cash crops. Their lives have greatly improved. Memuna, the first female chief in the village, tells us, "I thank God for the help from Victoria and SowHope. The women can now put food on the table and send their children to school." Some of the women have built brick houses and moved out of the tin houses in which they were living. The women farmers invested in machines to process and package their produce to add value to their products. The SowHope team is greatly impressed by the resilience and passion of these women.

**Save the Date!**

SowHope's Annual Fundraising Gala will be held on Friday, September 27, 2024 at the **Pinnacle Center in Hudsonville, MI.**

We will be streaming the Gala LIVE online!

It's never too early to secure your corporate or table sponsorships. Please contact Aaron Hoxworth: aaron@sowhope.org | 616-433-1575

*Your donations go towards projects like this in Afghanistan. To donate, visit [www.sowhope.org/donate](http://www.sowhope.org/donate).*

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024



From left to right holding the banner: Board Vice Chair Beth Leeson, Board Member Fridah Kanini, Mayor Bliss, Mary Dailey Brown, & Board Chair Mita Fitzjohn.

SowHope hosted its 2nd annual International Women's Day (IWD) march in downtown Grand Rapids on March 8th. To celebrate women around the world, 60 people gathered in the pouring rain. "When they told me that people in West Michigan were hardy they weren't kidding", Mary Dailey Brown said in her opening speech. "I couldn't have imagined this many people enduring this type of weather!"

Despite the bad weather, nothing could rain on our parade! The event began with an IWD-themed song release from Chicago musical artist and West Michigan local Elysia Marie. SowHope then honored the first woman mayor of Grand Rapids, Rosalynn Bliss, and SowHope Board Member and Founder/CEO of A Glimpse of Africa, Fridah Kanini, who both gave thoughtful remarks about International Women's Day and the importance of celebrating the global holiday in our local community. Under the cover of many umbrellas, the rugged group then completed a 1-mile triumphant walk around the city, beginning and ending at Calder Plaza.



Grace Theisen & Carolyn Koebel

Finally, the group was met with hot cocoa, coffee, and homemade treats while local musicians Grace Theisen and Carolyn Koebel performed.

Spirits were high throughout the event and many volunteers came early and stayed

late to help make the event great. "We were disappointed in the weather", said SowHope Administrative Director Aaron Hoxworth, "but we were delighted in the group that came to support the cause. We hope to continue to build momentum for this event for years to come." Thank you to everyone who attended the event and to those who were able to make it happen. See you next year on a sunny Saturday! *Photos by Alex Comben.*

## INSIDE THE FILMING OF THE UPCOMING SOWHOPE DOCUMENTARY

The SowHope team has been gathering and filming stories for a new documentary. At the center of the project is SowHope friend Chad Kremer, an experienced filmmaker. We talked to Chad about what it has been like seeing SowHope projects and interviewing the women that are being inspired. "The opportunity to meet the local people and be involved in this project is such a unique experience, said Chad, "How fortunate we are to meet people in their element while they are so open to us and embrace us!"

Chad wants to communicate the difference in SowHope's approach: "The old idea of charity is to just give and people are blessed; but this is completely different. SowHope inspires others by offering tools to get out of poverty cycles rather than just giving temporary resources, which can develop a relationship of dependency. SowHope redefines charity in a very holistic sense."

Chad believes that this film will go a long way to change the hearts of those that watch it. "People just don't understand what is going on with poverty around the world because they really don't see it. Our interviews with the women are so crucial because you hear from those that are actually going through it. This is a fresh approach to inspiring change that will resonate with viewers."

Filming hasn't come easy. Language barriers, technical problems, and safety concerns have been constant obstacles. But the access that SowHope has to the people it works with has only come from building relationships. "It's difficult from a cultural standpoint," said Chad. "You have to spend time with the people and develop trust in order to hear the stories of how these projects have impacted them." We are excited to share more information on the release date of the documentary soon!

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Mita Fitzjohn - Chairperson  
Leecie Brown  
Dr. Robert Cunningham

Lizbeth Leeson - Vice Chairperson  
Fridah Kanini  
Doreen Mangrum

Alfred Longtin - Treasurer  
Mac McDonnell  
Kathleen Muedder

Lauren Spangler - Secretary  
Arnaldo Rodriguez  
Christie Unakalamba