



The Central Asia Institute & Pennies for Peace Story

Central Asia Institute (CAI) is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1996. A nonprofit organization is a corporation or an association that conducts business for the benefit of the general public without a profit motive. Nonprofit organizations often exist to further cultural, educational, religious, professional, or public service objectives.

CAI works with communities in remote areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan to promote education, especially for girls. CAI provides funds to build new schools, repair and improve existing schools, and purchase equipment—such as uniforms, furniture, and school supplies—for students and teachers. Additionally, CAI funds scholarships, teacher support, public health programs, women’s vocational and literacy centers, and global outreach efforts. CAI empowers communities of Central Asia through literacy and education, promotes peace through education, and conveys the importance of these activities globally.

When CAI began its work, there was no formula for building schools in Central Asia. CAI soon realized that creating community support for the school projects was essential for success. CAI’s philosophy is to empower local people to be fully involved in every aspect of a project. CAI’s community partnerships are facilitated by village committees, whose members are selected for their dedication, initiative, and accountability. These partnerships take great care to cooperate with government, political, and religious groups. Each project is locally initiated, implemented, and managed in its entirety. CAI encourages people to take responsibility for their own vitality. The community matches CAI funds with equal amounts of local resources and labor to ensure the project’s viability and long-term success. CAI’s successful projects are a solid testimony to the strength of community-based initiatives.

Pennies for Peace is a division of CAI. One hundred percent of the money that is donated to Pennies for Peace goes directly to building new schools, repairing and improving existing schools, and purchasing equipment for students and teachers in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Pennies for Peace is a wonderful program because almost everyone can collect pennies!

The very first Pennies for Peace donation was from a group of elementary students in Wisconsin who collected pennies to help build a school in Korphe, Pakistan! Since then, CAI has built over 190 schools, and over 100,000 students have been supported in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.

Since Pennies for Peace began, CAI has seen the positive impact of the education of children on both sides of the Pennies for Peace bridge. In the villages of Central Asia, an education provides the opportunity to break the cycle of extreme poverty, terrorism, and war. At the same time, as students in our country participate in Pennies for Peace, they broaden their cultural horizons and come to understand their own capacity as philanthropists. They learn valuable skills such as critical thinking and collaboration—working together to become members of a global community dedicated to peace.

Pennies for Peace and Central Asia Institute believe that education coupled with compassion can move mountains. They want students, our future leaders, to understand the issues facing the world and to know that they have the capacity to effect change—because the greatest legacy we can give our children is one of lasting peace.