**House of Flowers Annual and Financial Report**

**2014**

**Overview**

For nearly 13 years, since autumn of 2002, the House of Flowers in Kabul has been a stable home and school for orphan children from destitute families from all over Afghanistan. This home possess the unique structure of being designed on Montessori principles for education and child development. Over the years, this experimental design has proven itself over and over.

It is exactly this stability and consistency that is the strength of the House of Flowers, and yet this also means that each year is much like the year before. Each year is instead marked by the kinds of events that any family with children would highlight: moving to a new home, taking trips, doing homework and performing well in school, attending entertaining cultural programs, learning how to cook and sew and make arts and crafts, celebrating holidays, sending siblings off to college. All of these events took place in the House of Flowers over the past year, with the 30 children and 9 staff of the House of Flowers.

**The Children and Their Lives in the House of Flowers**

For most of 2014, the House of Flowers was home to 30 children. One third were girls, and two thirds boys. The youngest was Amina, age 5, and the oldest was 17, Maryam. The children come to the House of Flowers through our protocol with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, who refer desperate children or families to the House. The majority of children in the House have been there for over 5 years. Maryam, the oldest, has been at the House since she was 6, and she is now 17. She has literally grown up in the House, as have a number of the older children.

As they have since the beginning, all of the children attend the local schools for a few hours a day where they learn basic subjects along with their neighborhood peers and are integrated into the formal education system for exams, etc. The rest of the time, they receive additional lessons from their teachers in the House of Flowers. The teachers have been trained in Montessori education principles, techniques and materials, and implement the free-flowing classrooms inspired by the Montessori approach. The children work in small groups on their own tasks, using extensive hands-on materials to concretize abstract concepts and making their own projects in areas such as geography, biology, geometry, culture, and poetry, as well as strengthening their skills in math and language. As a result, the majority of the House of Flowers children have skipped one or two grades in the local schools, and they catch up very quickly on lost time if they started school late due to the difficulties in their early childhoods. Below is a quote from the House teacher Fatima, telling of two girls’ rapid progress after joining the House of Flowers:

*Hadia ( هدیه ) now is 7 years old she came to House of Flowers on (31/ 5/ 2014), and another younger girl which her name is Zahra (زهره) she is 9 years old and she came in Hof on (16/10/2014).  
So at first when they come in the house of flowers they couldn’t Read and write even their Name.  
After work with Montessori materials with other children in Hof now on (23/3/2015) they are going to school in 3rd grade. They are very, very happy to go to school! I am very proud of Montessori Elementary Education for kids.*

Besides the academic advantages of a Montessori approach, the House is designed to run on the principles of freedom and responsibility and respect that underlie Montessori education. As a result, the children gain confidence, a sense of purpose and belonging, and learn the cultural graces of their country through the guidance of the dedicated staff.

**Major Events in 2014**

* A fun and inspiring visit by the Kabul Mobile Mini-Circus children’s group
* Attended classical music concerts in Kabul (via the New Rotary Club)
* Field trip to Paghman lake and amusement park
* Art projects through Constellation project
* Filming at the House for inclusion in a Canadian film documentary
* Moved to a new house
* Teacher Qudsieh left, new teacher Basira joined

One security-related issue also occurred. Although the House of Flowers staff is entirely dedicated to the health and well-being of the children, Kabul is not always a stable place, and things can easily occur despite all precautions being taken. One such event was a bombing at a nearby school which shook the neighborhood of the House of Flowers and broke several windows in the House. The children have been instructed where to go in the house in the event of any such bomb or explosive event. In this case, no one in the House was injured, but it was a frightening reminder of the volatile situation in Kabul.

**Growing Up**

In the last two years, the House of Flowers has been entering a new phase, just like a family does whose children are growing up. Many of the children who came when they were 4 – 8 years old have finished high school and have begun their lives outside of the House of Flowers. Some have passed exams and have begun their university studies. Razia is now in her sophomore year studying education at Kabul University. Her sister Nadia is in her freshman year, potentially studying law. Maryam will be taking her exams and hoping to attend university next year.

Several of the boys have also gone on to take university courses while entering the work force: Waheed, Basir, Noorullah, Obaid, Gul Mohammad and Zaki are all working. These boys who grew up together are like brothers, and they return regularly to visit the House of Flowers and spend time with the adults who were so important to their childhoods. The fact that they return is highly significant – it means that they retain feelings of belonging and connection. In other words, the House of Flowers is not a “project” with an end. It is a family, with relationships that never end.

**Changes**

The House of Flowers experienced two major changes at the end of 2014. After struggling with maintenance issues for months, the staff decided to find a new house. They located a much newer house 1 km away and the whole house moved. This required registering the children in a new school, but the staff took care of all of that paperwork.

In addition, Qudsieh, a revered and respected teacher at the House for 6 years, got married and moved to Germany with her family. The House and the children were very sad to see her go. About a month later, a new teacher joined the House. This new teacher, Basira, has studied education, and has also worked in other orphanages. As a result of this experience, she quickly developed a great love and appreciation for the House of Flowers, seeing how much love and care was present, compared to the orphanages where she worked before. She was immediately under Fatima’s tutelage to learn about Montessori education, and has been learning it rapidly. She emails often and expresses her love for the children and how happy she is to be there.

**Staff Longevity**

The House of Flowers is run by 9 adults who provide care, security, education and support to the children 24 hours a day. This year the only turnover has been the loss of the teacher Qudsieh, and one new guard. Thanks to the dedication of these staff, we have had very little turnover, with the same the same manager, teacher, cook, two guards, laundry/cleaning woman, and girls’ night guard, for over 6 years. Some of them have been with us for 10 years, and some from the very beginning.

**Financial Breakdown**

In 2014, the monthly budget for the House was $6400/month (a 9% increase from 2013).

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| **Monthly Average Expenses 2014** | | |
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| **Salaries**  (1 manager, 2 teachers, 1 cook, 2 cleaning staff, 3 guards/night staff) | | $ 2,785.00 |
| **Food** | | $ 1,300.00 |
| **Rent** | | $ 1,200.00 |
| **Operations and Supplies** (includes office and school supplies, clothes and shoes, medicines, cleaning supplies, hygiene supplies, kitchen equipment, etc) | | $ 450.00 |
| **Energy** (electricity bill, fuel for generator and heaters) | | $ 650.00 |
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| **TOTAL** | | **$ 6385.00** |

The rate of inflation in Kabul has eased this year, but to keep up with necessary increases in the cost of living, we are planning on another 9% increase to $7000/month for 2015:

**Projected Budget for 2015**

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| **Projected Monthly Average Expenses for 2015** | | |
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| **Salaries**  (1 manager, 2 teachers, 1 cook, 2 cleaning staff, 3 guards/night staff) | | $3,035.65 |
| **Food** | | $1,417.00 |
| **Rent** | | $1,300.00 |
| **Operations and Supplies** (includes office and school supplies, clothes and shoes, medicines, cleaning supplies, hygiene supplies, kitchen equipment, etc) | | $490.50 |
| **Energy** (electricity bill, fuel for generator and heaters) | | $708.50 |
| **TOTAL monthly** | | **$6,951.65** |
| **TOTAL annually** | | **$83,424** |

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| ***Financial Breakdown from 2014 and Projections for 2015*** | |
| Carry-over from 2013 | $36,655 |
| Individual donors (1-3 times each, average $300) | $18,777 |
| Consistent donors, members (monthly) | $ 9,940 |
| Foundations (grants) | $32,000 |
|  |  |
| **Total** | **$97,372** |
| **Expenses from 2014**  ($6400 x 12 months) | $76,800 |
| **Carry-over to 2015**  (projected through March 2015 with monthly budget of $7000, annual budget $84,000) | $20,572 |
| **Required for rest of 2015 (based on new budget)** | $62,852 |

**Logistics**

In Kabul, the House of Flowers is run by the staff that is paid by MEPO. HEWAD, our Afghan partners, assist with administration and government liaising.

In Ohio in the US, MEPO is run by a volunteer staff that coordinates donations and accounting. We also have a relationship with the non-profit organization *Lantern Projects* which hosts MEPO as a project on its website and thus facilitates tax-deductible donations for those in the US who require a tax deduction. One hundred percent of donations to Lantern Projects that are earmarked for the House of Flowers are sent directly to MEPO.

**Conclusion**

Having existed for more than 13 years, the House of Flowers has proven itself as a viable, dynamic and powerful model that works, having changed the lives of dozens of children over the years. We will continue to do so for the sake of children and Afghanistan.

Submitted by:

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