

Hello Everyone! This note is to report that OPERATION DREAMSEED hosted its first successful event this past December 1, 2004.

After weeks of planning and preparing, many different pieces of our event came together to make for an incredible experience. First, school supplies from all over the United States, having arrived over the past several months, were organized and divided up to fill nearly 2500 backpacks. This effort would not have been possible without the help of so many folks. To see a list of our supporters that helped in this tremendous logistical effort, please check the Operation Dreamseed website ([www.operationdreamseed.org](http://www.operationdreamseed.org)) for a full listing of all our participants. Nearly all these school supplies were donated and shipped to us by a host of heartland heroes that gave selflessly.

As the supplies came in, Soldier volunteers from units based out of Kandahar Airfield gathered to fill each and every backpack with school supplies, toys, and candy. School supplies included a basic kit of paper notebooks, folders, pens, pencils, erasers, scissors, ruler/protractor, glue, crayons/colored pencils, and pencil sharpeners. I want to give a special "Thank You" to the Soldiers of the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club and the Kandahar Provisional Reconstruction Team. Without their efforts, this event would not have been as nearly successful.

Loading up 10 large shipping containers, moving them with forklifts, and filling up two large 5-ton cargo trucks demonstrated to all of the Soldiers exactly how much work they had done. Over 2500 backpacks take up a great deal of space.

The plan was to move the cargo downtown to the Sherzai Education Centre soccer field for an event called, "I Choose Freedom." This event was coordinated by the School Director and Operation Dreamseed organizers. The event hosted over 2000 students from all across Kandahar City; over 500 attendees were female students. Select students were given the opportunity to give a speech. Speech topics were: Freedom, Democracy, the Importance of Voting, Women's Rights and Issues, Peace, and Unity.

What was so impressive about this event? Well, in a society where 80-90% of the population is illiterate, public gatherings are a form of news, education and entertainment. Imagine a society where very few households have electricity of any sort, even more so have no radio or television. Public gatherings and speechmaking are a form of public awareness and news dissemination. Much like in our revolutionary past, the Afghan sons and daughters of liberty spoke of freedom.

The success of the recent successful democratic elections and the December 7th Inauguration of President Karzai were the main topics. However, in a very new twist to this culture, the female students, the majority shedding their burkha, took full opportunity to speak their inner feelings and thoughts. Poems about freedom were read, an important monologue on the treatment of women was issued to the audience, and the women, sitting within arms distance of their male counterparts cheered with effusion. The Governor awarded each female participant her award for having the courage to stand up in such a public forum to talk about these important (and many times politically charged) issues.

The event went exactly according to plan. Young students that gave speeches were awarded either a bicycle (male students) or clothing vouchers to local tailors (female

students). As the event came to a close, Soldiers presented each teacher with a leather bound portfolio, and each student attendee with a backpack.

The nature of the Afghan students made them very anxious to receive the backpack. Each distribution point was flooded with a press of students. They were worried that there may not be enough backpacks to go around. However, as Soldiers unloaded cargo box after cargo box full of backpacks a feeling of calm excitement imbued the children as both old and young received a special backpack full of treats.

As coalition forces drove away, the smiles and laughter of the children literally filled the streets of Kandahar City. Kids with new backpacks and ear-to-ear smiles lined the streets as they walked home, waving as we drove by. It was an incredibly rewarding experience that you really had to see to understand.

A gentleman and U.S. citizen that grew up in Kandahar City, but now works for coalition forces as a translator gave his insightful perspective to the event on the drive back to Kandahar Airfield. "Every backpack we distributed put a smile on the face of a child," he stated, "Different tribes, men and women, all came together in an amazingly successful event that reinforced the unity that continues to grow among Afghan citizens." "Over 2000 smiling children symbolizes so much joy that these kids rarely experience," he reflected with a smile.

Pictures and video will soon follow. OPERATION DREAMSEED "I Choose Freedom" mission complete. For full access to all pictures of this truly amazing event, please keep your eyes on our website: [www.operationdreamseed.org](http://www.operationdreamseed.org)

Very Respectfully,  
Captain Todd Schmidt