

The Sag Harbor Express.

Creating Jobs, Creating Peace

Posted on 05 November 2010



By Vanessa Pinto

Earlier this week, Tahera Mohammadi of Afghanistan came to the Sag Harbor office of Gregory Ferraris of Banducci, Katz and Ferraris for a day of training to learn and observe first hand accounting business practices.

Mohammadi was among a group of 10 entrepreneurs from post-conflict countries who traveled to the United States as apprentices to further their skills in running their own businesses. Ferraris' office was one of a number of accounting firms Mohammadi visited while in the U.S. in order to gain a wider perspective of the field.

The trip was sponsored by the organization Bpeace which helps entrepreneurs in conflict-ridden countries gain the skills and insight necessary to build successful businesses back in their home countries. The purpose of creating these businesses and the jobs that grow from them is also to promote peace within the communities of these countries.

"It has been a wonderful experience learning everything," says Mohammadi who started a business development service called Balkh in Mazar City, the fourth largest city in Afghanistan. She is currently expanding the business into an accounting service.

Mohammadi spent all day Monday in Ferraris' office learning about administration and staffing and also reviewed business plans for financing and went over general United States accounting principles. She also met with accountants in Manhattan and business consultants in Connecticut and participated in intense training sessions in QuickBooks for accounting.

"The program has been very successful at promoting its goals and its mission purpose," says Ferraris, who provides auditing and consulting services to BPeace. "Their professional efforts are outstanding."

“It was a wonderful experience working with Tahera the entire day,” he adds. “I certainly understand that her entrepreneurship is a very promising step to promoting jobs to increase peaceful relations in her community.”

Water Mill’s Toni Maloney is the CEO and founder of BPeace, an award-winning non-profit network of business professionals who volunteer to work with the foreign entrepreneurs, also called Fast Runners. Maloney notes that the businesses these entrepreneurs create result in significant employment and expanded economic power for both women and men.

“The entrepreneurs are already on track for success upon beginning the program,” explains Maloney. “All the businesses created have 100 percent generating income.”

Which is saying quite a bit, particularly for women entrepreneurs in countries like Afghanistan.

“It is very difficult for women in Afghanistan — and in the United States — to establish and sustain businesses on their own,” explains Maloney. “Her [Mohammadi’s] family is supporting her in starting this business.”

BPeace began in Afghanistan in 2002 and in Rwanda in 2003. The organization is currently expanding into El Salvador, a Central American country with a growing economy and a long history of community violence. El Salvador appears to be one of the most promising countries notes Maloney. BPeace is also looking into Kenya and Liberia, countries where businesses can sustain themselves.

BPeace’s current group of two dozen female and male entrepreneurs are based in Mazar and Kabul, Afghanistan and they run businesses that range from construction and IT to consulting and shoe manufacturing. In Rwanda, businesses created have included coffin making, creation of a recreational facility for Rwandan families that includes a swimming pool, children’s rides and a restaurant, as well as a food delivery service.

Maloney explains that anyone with a small, promising business or an idea for a business in the countries BPeace serves is welcome to apply. The entrepreneurs often find the opportunity through the Internet after visiting the BPeace website and downloading the application. This year, more than 100 individuals applied. Among the success stories is an Afghan woman named Fatima who employs over 3,000 illiterate women whom she trained as carpenters to produce traditional Afghan furniture and wooden toys. Most of the women she employs are war widows.

This year’s groups of entrepreneurs came to the United States for three weeks, where they apprenticed at companies related to their trade. After a two day orientation, the group took part in what is called a “forward plan” that launches the entrepreneurs into business and reviews what they have learned. For three years following their apprenticeships, sometimes longer, the entrepreneurs are continually mentored.

“The people from BPeace are there to offer their advice,” explains Mohammadi. “There is a one month general meeting and an individual meeting once per month.”

For more information and to become involved with BPeace, visit their website at www.bpeace.org.