

Introduction to TEAR Australia – Mooroolbark Uniting

Deborah Storie, Nov 2017.

It's a privilege to be with you this morning to thank you on behalf of TEAR Australia and, later, to share the message.

In the next few minutes, I'd like to tell you a bit about TEAR and then share two stories from TEAR's partner organisations in Afghanistan.

TEAR Australia is a movement of Christians in Australia inspired by biblical visions of a more justice and compassionate world in which all people and communities enjoy fullness of life and all creation rejoices.

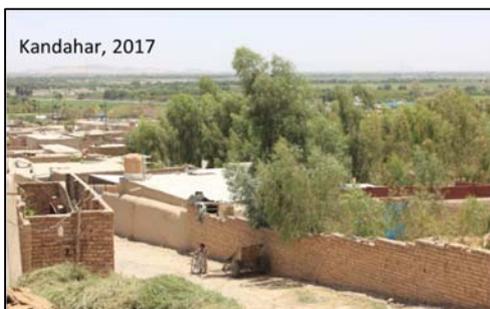
TEAR is motivated by the conviction that God loves all people and offers new life in Christ.

In Australia, TEAR partners with churches and other groups to engage Australian Christians in God's work of justice and compassion whereby the gospel of Christ which is good news to the poor is proclaimed and demonstrated through biblically-shaped responses to suffering and injustice.

Internationally, TEAR partners with churches and other Christian groups that work with the poor to seek justice and peace in their own countries. In contexts where TEAR cannot partner with local Christian groups, TEAR partners with international Christian agencies with long-term relationships and projects.

TEAR partners with several international Christian development organisations in Afghanistan. Between them, these projects use all the gifts in the Useful Gift Catalogue except those designated for Indigenous Australia.

Kandahar City in Southern Afghanistan is one of the fastest growing cities in the world. In addition to natural population growth, families move to the city when the countryside can no longer support them due to climate change, mechanisation of agriculture and other factors, and others return to Afghanistan after being expelled from Iran, Pakistan and other countries. One of TEAR's partners has worked with informal urban fringe settlements of families in Kandahar since 2004.



It uses an inclusive community development approach to develop stronger and more consultative leadership and empower people with disabilities, women and other marginalised groups. Here you can see a men's Self Help Group listening in the background while one of its members relates his experience of the group in Afghan Sign Language. The project helps community leaders to register

settlements with the government so that they no longer fear being bulldozed and can access health, education and other services to which they are entitled.

Another of TEAR's Partners works with women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Kabul and



Mazar. SHGs transform the lives of women, some of whom rarely left their yards before, as they meet weekly with new friends, learn, save, plan and dream together.

Visiting SHGs in Kabul 2003, I asked several groups to draw me pictures of their lives – what was important to them and what they valued.

This picture is typical. You can recognise a broom, a cooking pot a washing tub and clothes, a child, and a cup of tea. See the circle on the lower right with a diagonal stripe? That's piece work embroidery.



Many pictures included one thing I couldn't understand. It's at the top of this picture, a circle with dots around it and a pointy object to the right.

As women explained their drawings, they said, "That's my almonds." I knew that these women

could not be *eating* almonds. Almonds are expensive, very expensive. These women were poor. What's with the almonds? Apart from me, everyone seemed to know. In the end, I asked. "Forgive me, I'm not from here and I don't know how things work. Would you please explain about the almonds in your lives?" They thought this was hilarious! How could someone like me who came from the other side of the world and reads and writes not know about almonds? Everybody knows about almonds! Their sons or husbands collect 70 kg sacks of unshelled almonds from an almond merchants. They shell the almonds, sometimes with a hammer, sometimes with a stone. They don't eat any and are careful not to break them. Merchants weigh the shelled almonds on return and demand payment if they weigh short. What are the women paid for shelling almonds? They get to keep the shells. The shells are fuel: to cook food, to keep warm during winter snows, and to make tea for guests. Yes, shelling almonds is slow and tedious, but it's dignified work. The women are proud to provide for their families. They demand respect, not charity. SHGs enable them to make friends, learn and save together, try new things, and grow confident as they encourage each other, support their families and help themselves.

What does a biblically shaped response to suffering and injustice involve here in Australia? A holistic response involves 5 responses:

1. **Learn** - Hear the voices of the poor and marginalised, grow in your understanding of God's Kingdom vision, the state of our world, and the work of TEAR's partners.
2. **Pray** – for world in which God's will is done and God's Kingdom come". Seek to see the world through God's eyes.
3. **Live** - take practical steps to live justly through everyday lifestyle and investment choices.
4. **Advocate** - for those made captive by oppressive systems and for people and places broken by greed and injustice. Join with others to bring about real change
5. **Give** – financially to support the work of agencies like TEAR that seek to build a more just and compassionate world.

Thank you for your gifts and prayers that enable projects like those I've described.
I hope their stories will encourage you to continue learning, praying, living, advocating and giving for a more just and compassionate world.