

2013 Ann C. Michel Award Winner

About the Program: Kabultec, Afghanistan

ProLiteracy began working in Afghanistan with Nasrine Gross in 2002. (Frank Laubach taught in Afghanistan in the 1930s).

The Roqia Center, ProLiteracy's Afghan partner, has developed an innovative literacy program for couples in some of Kabul's poorest neighborhoods. Attending class often means being in the same room with other men and women not of their own family, with the women's faces uncovered. For the first time couples are doing something together on equal footing with each other's efforts and abilities respected, nurtured, and encouraged. The experience is life-changing. Quite beyond the teaching of adult literacy, the program is transformative both psychologically and culturally.

Every class includes people of different ethnic backgrounds which have historically been in conflict with one another: Hazara, Pashtun, Tajik and Sadat. Typically these groups have few opportunities to interact with the kind of congeniality and mutual respect found in the literacy class. Bringing couples together outside the home is a powerful way to promote overall change in the community. The literacy program creates channels for mutual understanding and respect that transcends traditional barriers of gender, class and politics.

Program Director, Nasrine Gross is an Afghan-American woman, working in her native land, determined to change an enduring legacy of the Taliban regime. The literacy rate in Afghanistan is among the lowest in the world at just 10 percent. Gross started the couple's literacy training by going into the poorest neighborhoods in Kabul, knocking on doors and asking husbands and wives if they were interested. Gross said she launched the project against the advice of the Afghan organization on ethnicities, which said the husbands would not allow it. "When you have such a staggering rate of illiteracy, you have a problem with both men and women accepting the participation of women in society." Gross believes that assisting their cause is an integral part of the country's democratization and reconstruction.

The Ann C. Michel International Women in Literacy Award

The Ann C. Michel International Women in Literacy Award recognizes and helps advance the work of an outstanding ProLiteracy Women in Literacy partner organization. The annual award is given to an international literacy organization that helps women in greatest need in developing countries make significant life changes through literacy. The award consists of a cash prize and a travel stipend.

The Ann C. Michel International Women in Literacy Award is sponsored by a gift bestowed in her memory by Knowledge Systems & Research, Inc., the international firm that she founded and led, and by her family and friends.

The award recipient will be an existing ProLiteracy Worldwide international partner organization that is led by women and serves women through literacy and social action programs. ProLiteracy's international partners are local, nongovernmental organizations that actively provide literacy instruction in the context of addressing the pressing needs of their communities. These partner organizations participate in ProLiteracy Worldwide's training and/or direct grant program and are committed to its model of community development and social change through education.

The award winner will serve women in communities where literacy needs are the greatest. The award winner will support women learners as they become empowered with practices, information, and the confidence to improve their lives. The award winner will demonstrate innovation, ethics, and leadership. The award winner's literacy curriculum will be consistent with the stated learning priorities of the participants and will reflect the needs and priorities of the local women learners that it serves. The organization will have an established, demonstrable track record for effective literacy program management and delivery of instruction. The award winner will participate in reporting the outcomes of its program annually or more often if requested.

Selection Procedure

ProLiteracy International Program staff annually review eligible organizations from four global regions of service: Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Guided by the award criteria, International Programs makes a recommendation to the ProLiteracy Board of Directors on a candidate that best meets the criteria. The ProLiteracy Board will then present the Ann C. Michel International Women in Literacy Award at ProLiteracy's annual conference.