



## SUMMARY

- Afghan refugee who has taught at Pakistan's Kot Chandana camp for over 20 years
- Set up a school for girls in a tent, overcoming resistance from the conservative community
- Today there are 9 schools in the camp with over 1,500 students including 900 girls
- Winner of the UNHCR's 2015 Nansen Refugee Award

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# AQEELA ASIFI

## PAKISTAN

### BIO

Aqeela trained as a teacher when education in Afghanistan was free to all but was forced to leave the country when the Taliban took over in 1992. When she arrived as a refugee at the Kot Chandana camp in Pakistan there were no operational schools in the local area. Strongly conservative attitudes meant the education of girls was frowned upon and female teachers were unheard of.

Aqeela set up a school in a borrowed tent and worked hard to overcome resistance and negative attitudes. Twenty families agreed to their daughters being educated and Aqeela initially focused on teaching non-controversial subjects such as personal hygiene, home management skills and religious education. After gaining the trust of the community, Aqeela was able to introduce literacy, Dari language, mathematics, geography and history. There was no money for resources like blackboards so Aqeela stitched pieces of cloth with handwritten text to the tent walls and wrote books by hand at night. Her students traced their first words in dust on the floor.

Today, there are nine schools in the camp with many female teachers and over 1,500 students including 900 girls. With education, early and forced marriages in the community have declined.

Aqeela's school has produced over 1,000 graduates (mainly Afghan refugee girls, but also local Pakistani children). Some have become doctors, engineers, government officials and teachers in Afghanistan.

Aqeela was presented with the UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award in 2015.