

News

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2009 HUNTINGTON AWARD TO AID IN STUDENTS' PUBLIC SERVICE MISSIONS

WALTHAM, Mass., June XX, 2009 -- Two recent college graduates will now be putting their ideas for community service and social engagement into action in Afghanistan and Tanzania with help from the Samuel Huntington Public Service Award.

Sadiqa Basiri of Mount Holyoke College and Wendy Herrera of Brandeis University are this year's recipients of the Samuel Huntington Public Service Award. Each has been awarded a \$10,000 grant to pursue her proposed vision. Basiri's work will begin next month in Kabul, Afghanistan, Herrera's in late August in Usa River, Tanzania. The award honors the work of Samuel Huntington, former President and CEO of the New England Electric System, now National Grid, and is part of National Grid's ongoing "Power of Action" campaign.

Jennifer Huntington issued the awards on May 14, following a formal vote of the Samuel Huntington Fund Board of Directors. Basiri is an international relations major with plans for improving educational opportunity and diversity in her native Kabul, Afghanistan. Herrera, a resident of North Miami Beach, Fla. is an anthropology major with plans to institute a community-level sanitation and water purification campaign in Usa River, Tanzania.

"Each of these young women has incredible vision and initiative," said Tom King, president of National Grid's U.S. business. "We are so happy to be able to help them to realize those visions as a part of the 'Power of Action.'"

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Equalizing Educational Standards and Opportunities in Afghanistan

Sadiqa Basiri's proposed project addresses the ongoing difficulties stemming from the education gap faced by many Afghan youth due to the former influence of the Taliban regime. Her plan is to reach out to those individuals who were kept from attending school until the fall of the Taliban in 2002. Educational disruption has had the effect of placing such students far behind many of their peers and therefore at a disadvantage when seeking gainful employment or continuing education at home or abroad.

Today, "few professional teachers and a lack of sufficient school supplies leave the government-run schools failing to provide quality education equally to all students" Basiri writes. "Since my high school graduation in 1998, I have been in search for learning more and sharing it with others. With more than 10 years of experience as a social worker, I am convinced that Afghanistan could be a stable state by providing equal access to education to boys and girls as well as men and women."

Basiri's project, called the Youth Capacity Building Initiative, will work to compensate for the Afghan government's inability to stretch already thin resources to invest in developing specialized curricula to meet these individuals' needs. The initial implementation of YCBI is intended to be a pilot program and will continue for between one and two years with the cooperation of the Oruj Learning Center in Kabul, previously co-founded by Basiri to help young girls in remote areas to obtain previously unattainable education. Each of the 100 accepted (11th and 12th grade level) YCBI applicants will receive instruction in English language and computer and Internet technology use. In addition, each student will design a community outreach program intended to further his or her capacity to act as a local leader and role model. Basiri hopes that the YCBI will provide these young men and women with the opportunity to obtain employment, financial aid or higher education and to participate more fully in Afghanistan's growth back into a healthy, prosperous state.

Following implementation of the YCBI, Basiri plans to go back to working with the Oruj Learning Center as well as with other charitable organizations of which she is a part. After one to two years of social work, she intends to return to school to pursue a master's degree in education, with a focus on developing countries.

Community-Level Approach to Ecological Sanitation

Wendy Herrera's proposed program introduces plans to employ local area contractors to construct 50 composting toilet facilities in the Usa River region. The use of these toilets will, "prevent groundwater contamination (reducing waterborne illness), while also producing safe fertilizer for agricultural use (increasing yield and nutritional quality of local harvests)."

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Research conducted by Herrera in the spring of 2008, suggested that local aid organizations were largely ineffective and “revealed an absence of safe, reliable sanitation, high rates of infectious disease and unsatisfactory nutrition.” To address these issues, Herrera designed a prototype for composting facilities that would separate solid from liquid waste. From there, appropriate waste may be utilized as fertilizer, helping to “increase the yields and nutritional value of crops, and eliminate contamination of the drinking water.”

Each of the planned 50 toilets will serve 20 to 25 people. “This approach, in addition to a year-long education campaign tailored to the specific needs of people at all socioeconomic levels of the community, will ensure that the 1,250 affected members will be empowered to continue maintaining their own toilets while spreading the idea to others,” Herrera wrote in her proposal.

Herrera hopes to join with local community organizations, working within existing social and economic structures to perform outreach and training and to encourage a sense of ownership among the local population. It is her hope that this approach will ensure sustainability of the project even after her time in the area is over.

Following implementation of her sanitation campaign, Herrera plans to join the Peace Corps in Sub-Saharan Africa, after which she will pursue a doctorate in environmental anthropology.

About the Award

The Public Service Award, now in its 21st year, was created in memory of Samuel Huntington who died in 1988. Huntington was an advocate of public service, having spent a year in Nigeria teaching science and mathematics. The award, funded by colleagues, family and friends at National Grid, offers grants to graduating college seniors on the basis of their academic records, personal accomplishments and their proposal for a public service project anywhere in the world.

National Grid is an international energy delivery company. In the U.S., National Grid delivers electricity to approximately 3.3 million customers in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Rhode Island, and manages the electricity network on Long Island under an agreement with the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA). It is the largest distributor of natural gas in the northeastern U.S., serving approximately 3.4 million customers in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Rhode Island. National Grid also owns over 4,000 megawatts of contracted electricity generation that provides power to over one million LIPA customers.

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