

Julia Bolz: Social Justice Activist



Julia Bolz is a nationally-recognized humanitarian and social justice advocate, who is dedicated to engaging, educating, and empowering the poor in the developing world. In 1998, she traded a successful law career to help people in the world's most impoverished regions amend discriminatory laws, procure microloans, establish businesses, and negotiate political challenges. She has travelled to some 70 countries around the world and worked as a volunteer for several dozen nongovernmental organizations, government agencies, and businesses using her legal, business and advocacy skills to

eradicate the worst aspects of hunger and poverty and to protect human rights.

After September 11, 2001, Julia focused on educating girls in Afghanistan and strengthening the Afghan school system. The founder of a program called "**Journey with an Afghan School**," Julia and her American implementing partners in Afghanistan have built 25 new schools and repaired over 20 others in Balkh Province, serving more than 20,000 students and impacting some 140,000 family members. They also have equipped the schools with wells, latrines, desks, school supplies, libraries, as well as science, art, and athletic equipment.

Seeking to empower and inspire the children and their families to build peaceful, just and life-affirming communities, as well as sustain the schools, Julia and her colleagues work closely with the Afghan Ministry of Education to come up with innovative, practical and sustainable solutions. If you walked into a school today, you might find 50 teachers receiving training in teaching methodologies; a meeting of community elders discussing security concerns; parents from multiple ethnic groups coming together at Parent Teacher Organization meetings; older girls who were forced to drop out of school participating in a literacy course; boys who used to carry weapons to class playing soccer; kids learning computer skills; or trainings on health/hygiene, life skills, child rights or agriculture.



Julia does not measure success simply by the number of schools she and her colleagues have built or the number of kids they serve, however. She defines success by **how** she and her colleagues work and treat others. This is demonstrated in the name of the NGO she founded in 2009 – **Ayni Education International**.

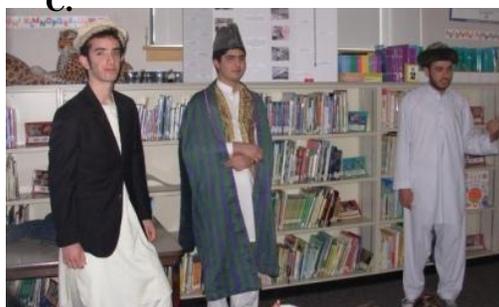
Ayni (pronounced EYE-knee) means "reciprocity." It stems from a world view that everything and everyone is intricately connected, so what happens on one side of the world can affect us all (as evident by what happened on September 11, 2001). Consequently, there is a focus on working together; learning about each other's cultures and beliefs; sharing resources and ideas; and serving out of love, gratitude, respect and humility.

To foster this ayni and build bridges of friendship and understanding, cooperation and peace between our countries, Julia has given over 530 "show and tell" presentations across the country to a wide array of audiences -- from thousands of school children to members of Congress and world leaders at the Aspen Institute. In addition to teaching about the history and culture of Afghanistan, she has taught about life in the developing world, the importance of education, and various solutions to combating extremism. She

also talks with students about the world's perception of the United States, the responsibilities we have as global citizens, and what they can personally do to make a difference albeit locally, nationally or globally. Her hope is that through cultural exchanges, educational presentations, and cross-cultural curricula, peoples of diverse religious, economic, and political beliefs and backgrounds would come to know each other.

Some 50,000 Americans across the country have "journeyed" with Julia over the past 10 years, including thousands from Seattle-area schools. If you happened to stop by Coe Elementary School a few years ago, for example, you might have seen children dressed up in turbans and burkas and David Elliott (the school's former principal who visited Coe's sister school in Afghanistan in 2007), taking the Governor of Balkh Province and several Afghan dignitaries on a tour of the school. A year ago at John Hay Elementary, students sat on the floor enjoying pilau from The Kabul Restaurant and Afghan exchange visitors spoke about their families and educational experiences in Afghanistan. This was all part of "A day in the Life of an Afghan Student" led by parents and teachers, interested in bringing a slice of Afghanistan to the children in Seattle, as well as creating global citizens.

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A graduate of Smith College and Northwestern University School of Law, Julia regularly speaks around the country, writes about her experiences, and meets face-to-face with political decision-makers. She is a powerful voice for those otherwise not heard. For over 10 years, she has been partnering with **RESULTS Educational Fund**, one of the country's most respected citizen grassroots lobbying organization whose mission is to empower citizens to end the worst aspects of hunger and poverty. Her goal is to see all kids, particularly girls, have an opportunity to attend primary school.

To leverage her work, Julia transitioned off the board of Ayni Education International in 2012. Currently on sabbatical, she is considering writing a book, as well as engaging in high-level advocacy and policy work on behalf of the 67 million children who are not in primary school.