

Doctors for Healthy Communities Supports



THE SUKOON WELFARE ORGANIZATION

An Orphanage in Faisalabad, Pakistan

DHC Interviews: Dr. Waseem Ahmad

Pakistani children have an incredible need for services and care in several spaces throughout the country. Here in America, Dr. Waseem Ahmad, a neurology specialist based in Iowa, has dedicated his resources to helping the children of his home country. Since 2017, he has founded and overseen the development of the Sukoon Welfare Organization, a blossoming orphanage in the Faisalabad district which provides housing, schooling and food needs.

Dr. Ahmad sat for an interview with DHC reporter Aaron Burch to talk about how his orphanage has grown since its inception and his plans for the future.

DHC: Dr. Ahmad, thank you for speaking with us today. I'd like to start by asking how the Sukoon Welfare Organization began.

Dr. Ahmad: In 2017, I had my own private practice and I owned the building. A hospital here in Iowa approached me to sell. I was unsure, but my wife encouraged me. Once we had the money, both of us felt we should do something to make a difference. I went back home to Pakistan, bought three acres of agricultural land and began work on what would become the Sukoon Welfare Organization, an orphanage for young men.

We ran water, electricity, natural gas pipes. The area is made up of three buildings structured as typical homes. They have a tv area/lounge, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, office space and some small quarters for the employees.

The idea was that orphaned children staying there would have everything we need. We house them, clothe them and pay for schooling. If they grow up and pursue a technical education, we'll pay for that also. Education is how you break the cycle of poverty. Once a person is educated, they can find a job. This is a lifelong project that will pay off many years later.

Excellent. Please tell me about your role in the organization these days.

It's a bit of a one man show. I make decisions on the children's education, work on new enrollment, work with staff, look at land development, etc. In October, I noticed we needed a basketball court. Before that, we worked on placing solar panels to save money on electricity. I try to go visit on site every six months, in March and October. The weather is very pleasant then. In the summer it gets to 120 or 130 degrees.

When I'm not there in person, I'm in touch with the orphanage through WhatsApp and Facetime. Photos and videos come to me, but it makes a real difference to be there physically.

What did you learn as the orphanage was being developed?

It took a year for construction. When we finally completed, the space was opened to any children in a 50-mile radius. We have the capacity for up to 30 children. We hired widows looking for shelter to work in a motherly role for each house. If a woman is employed by us, she lives in the house, cooks food, does laundry and sends the kids to school in the morning. Someone comes to help with the homework. We have 20 kids right now, but it took us a long time to reach that.

Initially, I overestimated. I thought that if you build it, they will come. When we opened, we had no kids. The guardians had no incentive to send their kids to us because they liked having free child labor.

There were so many misconceptions. Many families thought that Americans were going to take their kids away. It took us a longer time to realize that we must overcome those hurdles. After a year of trying, we had 5-6 kids. With time, those kids became our ambassadors. Their elders would come visit and see how well kept everything was. They could tell by the quality of food, the clean facilities, and the care we provided. Eventually, people realized the good work we were doing.

What is the approval/selection process like for children interested in the facility?

Every child who comes in is reviewed by me. Some families have social issues, some have financial issues. We are looking for young men who can't support themselves. If we can change that child's life, we can break the cycle of poverty. If he speaks English, he can easily get a job.

When I visited in March, a few kids didn't want to go to the English Medium School. Back home, English is not the first language. My idea is that they should know English because they can connect to the world. Google and YouTube open to them. Some of the kids thought that English was too hard, so I sat down with them.

My concern was that a few kids who didn't want to learn would influence others to work less hard. I told them that I wasn't good in all subjects. You don't have to be perfect in everything. I asked them what they wanted, and they said bicycles. So, I made a deal. If they continued to work to learn English for the next six months, I would buy them bicycles. We wanted to make sure these kids weren't taken advantage of in their society. There are extremist groups in the area who would feed them and house them, but also brainwash them. We want the kids to learn English so they can decide what is right and wrong for themselves.

What are your goals for the orphanage moving forward?

My ultimate goal was to make the organization financially independent. We don't generate any revenue. If something happens to me, what will happen to the boys? You can't make a kid an orphan for a second time. That's the worst thing you can do to them. So, I don't want it tied to my source of income.

The next step is to find avenues that can have revenue or invest so revenue keeps coming. For example, all vegetables are grown within the compound. This year, we hope to have two or three cows to provide our own milk. We could have free milk and sell a little bit to pay for feed. I mentioned the solar units. Those cut electricity costs in half.

Is there anything our audience can do to help?

Every time I travel, I take extra gifts in my suitcases. I take a lot of American clothes such as jackets, jeans, sweaters because they are sturdy. I try to spread the word for a month or two before I leave. Anyone who has clothes they do not use, let me take them.

DHC could also assist by funding bigger costs such as solar panels. We have five buildings currently and three have solar panels. That's an upfront investment that saves us money every month. A lot of my physician friends have said they want to pitch in. I don't say no. Maybe God sent them. Maybe God wants their money to be a part of that growth, to help those orphans, not me.

Is there anything else I haven't asked?

I just want to say that the main concept is so important. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of these kids by educating them. The main purpose is to break that cycle of poverty and keep these younger kids from falling into the wrong hands. There are bad people who take advantage of these orphans and use them for the wrong purposes. If I can do my small part to make a difference, that will have a long-lasting impact.

Doctors for Healthy Communities is collaborating with the Sukoon Welfare Organization to support education and boarding of orphan students in rural Pakistan. [Read our initial article and view photos here!](#) We remain committed to initiatives that will improve the lives of children worldwide, and look forward to sharing updates as this project moves forward.

To assist the Sukoon Welfare Organization, visit www.dhcus.org and donate. Send an email to dhcus502@gmail.com and let us know you want your donation to go to the Sukoon Welfare Organization. Thanks so much for reading!



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