



CHARMAGHZ

Annual Report 2022-2023



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Letter from our Founder



Dear Friends of Charmaghz,

As we share our 2022-2023 Annual Report and reflect on the past two years, I realize that it was a time of perseverance for us.

In 2021, when the Taliban took over Kabul, we faced an existential test. Despite the new political environment, financial crisis, and emotional challenges, we resumed our work within two months. We understood that the children in Afghanistan needed us more than ever. Our commitment was unwavering as we maneuvered through limitations and obstacles. Our collective energy, the community we built, and the passion in our hearts carried us forward. Our work could not have continued without the passion and commitment of each of our colleagues who worked tirelessly, navigated the new political landscape, and didn't give up, not even for a single minute.

Recently, I learned that the word "passion" originates from the Latin word "patrio," which means suffering or endurance. In 2022, I witnessed our organization's true passion. We endured hardships driven by the love for our mission, and through perseverance, we not only survived the political turmoil but also reached more children than ever before.

In 2022, we launched 10 new Mobile Libraries in the form of Library Boxes, complementing our existing 6 Mobile Bus and Van Libraries.

Our reach tripled as we welcomed over 350,000 child visitors, 54% of whom were girls. Each child who visited Charmaghz read at least one book before leaving the library. Additionally, we provided games designed to enhance literacy, numeracy skills, and mental health awareness.

In 2023 we secured funding for 14 more Libraries. Moreover, we reworked our vision, mission, and values to align them with the current context and the needs of children. We remained dedicated to placing children and their needs at the center of our thinking.

In 2024, our goals are to sustain our existing Libraries, launch new Libraries that are under construction, and expand our work through specialized programs to support children's literacy, numeracy, and mental health.

Looking back, I have so many people to thank for our continued success. I'd like to deeply thank the students (boys and girls) in Kabul who continue to visit our Libraries, reminding us every day of the difference we are making through their continued learning. I also want to thank parents and communities for providing extensive support to their children and to our colleagues. I extend my gratitude to our funders and partners for making our work possible. Your support enables us to continue our mission.

A sincere appreciation also goes to our volunteers and friends who generously gave their time, shared their networks, and stepped outside their comfort zones to support us, so we could continue our efforts in Charmaghz.

With Love,
Freshta Karim

Our Vision

Our vision is of a future Afghanistan where children are empowered as key agents of change both within their immediate lives, as well as within a long-term dialogue to generate justice, equity, and dignity for all Afghans.

Our Mission

Our mission is to provide a holistic, trauma-centered literacy and numeracy program to every child in Afghanistan that creates opportunities for learners to experience a sense of agency in their daily lives.



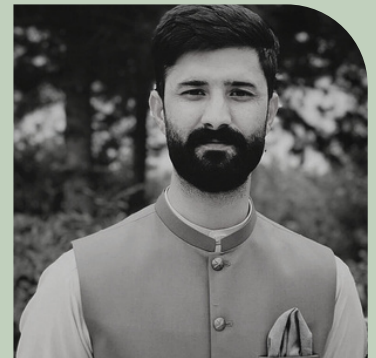
Introduction to our Board of Directors



Nawidullah Sane Sammari
Chairman of the Board



Azizullah Gulzada
Entrepreneur



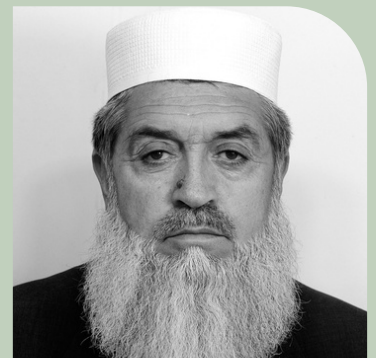
Bilal Bitanai
Entrepreneur



Sami Waziri
Entrepreneur (Owner of SPA
group)



Freshra Karim
Founder, Charmaghz



Gul Habib
Literacy Expert

Our Staff



36 Librarians

Charmaghz Librarians are an extraordinary team, trained with unwavering dedication and passion. Despite numerous hurdles, they persist in bringing education and joy to children's lives.

51
staff in
total

6 Bus Drivers

Charmaghz Bus Drivers are trained professionals, prioritizing children's safety and well-being. Their dedication to the young passengers shines through as they navigate the roads with care, ensuring every journey to knowledge and empowerment is a secure and joyful one.

96%
of our staff
is Afghan

9 Core Team Members

Charmaghz's Core Team is responsible for setting strategic priorities and contributing to the organization's and staff's day-to-day needs. The Core Team also regularly shares Charmaghz's work with current and potential supporters.

80%
of our staff
are women

Introduction to Our Core Team



Ahmad Siyam Barakati
Country Director



Freshta Karim
Founder and Director



Hasinah Sadat
Library Program Manager



Mohammad Mohammadi
Research and Capacity
Building Officer



Liz Robinson
Fundraising and
Partnerships Advisor



Hamid Habibi
Procurement Officer



Ahmad Sultani
Finance Officer



Gabby Guerra
Grants and Reporting
Manager



Safa Asheeq
HR Officer

Celebrating 5 Years of Charmaghz

In 2013 Charmaghz turned 5, which inspired us to reflect and celebrate our journey so far. On the 14th of February 2018, the first Charmaghz Mobile Library was inaugurated. The Blue Bus crisscrossed the streets of Kabul with a mission to spread love and books to the city's children.

As our work continued, we began to realize our dream of growth and impact. Over the next two years, we added the Yellow, Green, Pink, and Orange Library Buses. These Libraries were designed to be a space where children could be themselves and enjoy the wonders of childhood.

In 2022 we added a Van Library in Dasht-e-Barchi. The smaller vehicle made it easier to reach more secluded neighborhoods. In the same year, we also launched our Library Box project. Classrooms were now filled with stories and we were inspired by the boundless enthusiasm and creativity of children. Our 5th year has been dedicated to continuing to grow and reaching more children.

As we reflect on the outcomes of our work we see the visible difference not only for children but for their communities as well. Every year we have learned and responded to change. As we turn half a decade old, the children of Kabul need us now more than ever. Charmaghz has been and always will be a symbol of compassion and love. We hope to spread this message as we continue our work in the coming years!



The Afghan Education Crisis

The current situation

Afghanistan is facing a deep education crisis. 93% of 10-year-olds in Afghanistan are unable to read proficiently, and half of young children are not enrolled in school. Those who are in school are very unlikely to receive a quality education, due to longstanding systematic issues and limited resources throughout the schooling system, from teachers without the support they need to a lack of textbooks. As a result, most children (both boys and girls) do not fully engage with education and barely learn basic skills such as reading and writing. Equally troubling, the mainstream approach to education does not provide students with the skills to interact critically and constructively with challenging situations in their lives and communities, making it difficult for Afghanistan to break the cycle of poverty and conflict.

While comprehensive data on children's psychosocial and mental health in Afghanistan is scarce, it is likely that many children have experienced trauma, and are in need of mental health support. Without proper support, Afghan children are growing up without an understanding of how to deal with negative emotions and experiences, which may perpetuate the cycle of tension and conflict that has afflicted Afghanistan for decades.

Focus on foundational skills

Charmaghz exists to address this crisis. Now more than ever, we believe Afghan children have a right to quality education as well as a peaceful future—both of which must begin with a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy. These basic skills are a non-negotiable foundation for a life of learning, possibility, dignity, and agency for every child.



93%

Of 10 year olds
in Afghanistan
can not read



Our Programs

30 Mobile Libraries



Charmaghz first launched with our Blue Library Bus in 2018. Since then we have added Yellow, Green, Orange, and Pink Buses. These 5 Buses reach some of the most disadvantaged children in Kabul, offering them a safe and encouraging space to learn and grow.



In addition to the Library Buses we have added 5 Library Vans. These Vans are smaller than our Buses and allow us to access areas of Kabul that our Buses have a harder time reaching. Our Mobile Libraries operate in 14 of Kabul's 22 districts.



Our most recent addition to our Mobile Libraries was the launch of our Library Boxes. Currently we have 20 Library Boxes and rotate them between 54 public schools.

Our Mobile Libraries

Charmaghz is the largest chain of children's Libraries in Afghanistan, welcoming 3,000 visitors per day. In 2023 we ran 30 Mobile Libraries, including five Mobile Bus Libraries and five Mobile Van Libraries that work in neighborhoods throughout Kabul, and 20 Mobile Library Boxes that reach children in 54 public schools. While visiting our Libraries, children are supported to build basic literacy and numeracy skills, but also to engage in art activities, have an open mind, think critically, and develop a love of reading. Our Mobile Libraries are staffed by trained Librarians who also conduct community-outreach activities to reach local leaders and families with key messages on the importance of literacy and education.



Working in disadvantaged areas

We work in some of Kabul's most disadvantaged neighborhoods, including urban slums, where many children are facing extreme poverty and discrimination.

In addition, our Van Libraries are able to access more rural and remote areas of Kabul that our Bus Libraries are too large to traverse. In turn, the Van Libraries bring books and reading opportunities to the most marginalized children of Kabul, who otherwise have limited access to books and literacy.



Library Boxes

In 2022, Charmaghz launched ten mobile Library Boxes to extend our education services to 54 public schools in Kabul. Through the Library Box program, we have successfully reached over 160,000 students. Our inclusive approach ensures that children from diverse backgrounds and both genders have equal access to the resources provided by the Mobile Libraries.

Our dedicated Librarians conduct various activities, including book talks, mental health games, reading sessions, and group-based activities, offering more than 60 hours of classroom engagement per week. Each school is visited once or twice a week, allowing us to maximize our impact.

Since beginning the project in 2022 we have now added an additional ten Library Boxes. We are excited to see how this project continues to grow.



Our Focus Areas



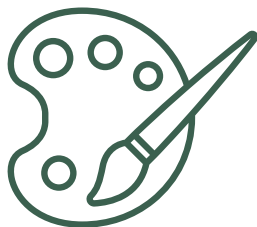
Building Foundational Skills



Critical Thinking



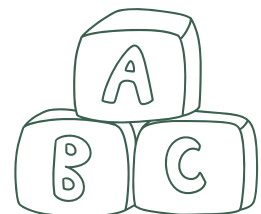
Mental Health



Art Activities



Storytelling Sessions



Learning Through Play





Our Impact

856,248

Visits by children from
2022-2023 to our Mobile
Libraries

54%

Of visits made by girls in
2022 and 2023

54

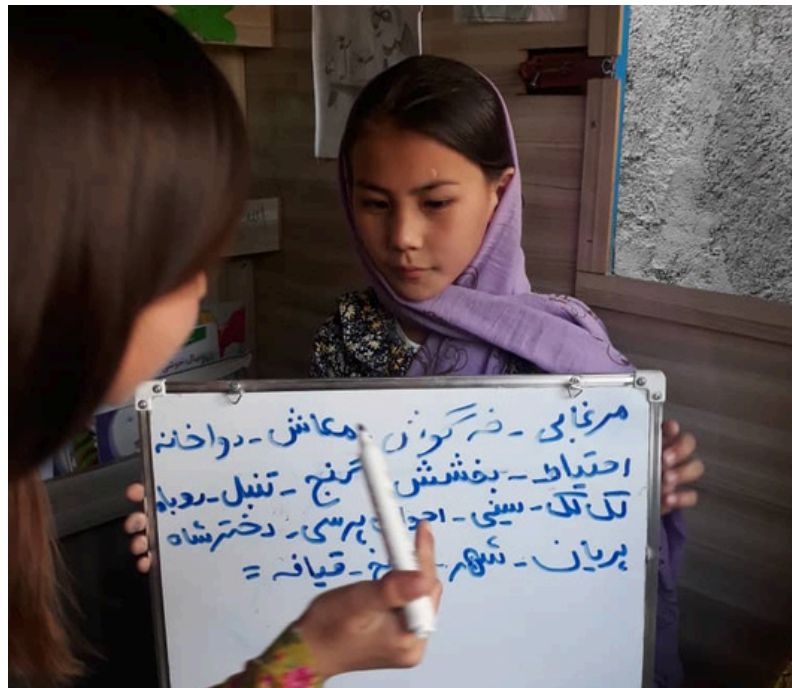
Public schools reached

302

Teachers supported by
Library Box Project

Through resilience and determination, Charmaghz has defied the odds and achieved a remarkable impact in 2022 and 2023. Despite facing hardships and enduring bans imposed by the Taliban, our unwavering commitment to children's education has left an indelible mark. In 2022 and 2023 alone 856,248 children have embarked on magical journeys within the pages of Charmaghz's Libraries - 54% of visits were made by girls, and we worked in 54 public schools and were able to support 302 teachers. These achievements are a testament to the power of education and the enduring spirit of Charmaghz and our team.

Stories from Charmaghz



Meet Nabila

Librarian, Van Library

March 8th, 2022, marked an important day for women around the world - International Women's Day—but it was also a key day for one woman in particular, Nabila. On that day, she courageously walked into the Charmaghz office to interview for a position. Despite it being her first formal meeting with Charmaghz, Nabila believed in herself, whispering words of encouragement, "Nabila, you can do it." And indeed, her interview went exceptionally well, leading her to join the Charmaghz team the next day.

For Nabila, the decision to join Charmaghz stemmed from her deep love for children. Their innate qualities of friendship, kindness, and curiosity intrigued her. Additionally, she sought a job that would not only support her family but also allow her to fulfill her responsibilities as a young member of her household. Charmaghz provided the perfect blend of formality and friendliness, creating an environment where Nabila felt completely comfortable alongside her colleagues.

As a Librarian in Charmaghz's Van Mobile Library, Nabila cherishes the diverse experiences she encounters daily. Meeting different children and interacting with her coworkers in the office brings her immense joy.



Nabila reading a story to children in the Van Library

"Every day working at Charmaghz is a beautiful memory for me, it has made me realize the incredible power of children."

One of her favorite moments is engaging in thought-provoking conversations with the children, as they share their unique and fascinating perspectives. “When I ask some questions from children and they give me different and interesting answers, I really love this part.”

Among the many beautiful memories Nabila has created at Charmaghz, one event stands out as a testament to the power of children. One day, during the Van Mobile Library's reopening in Dasht-e-Barchi after a tragic attack at a nearby school, the Abdul Rahim Shahid High School, a community councilman confronted Nabila, questioning the need for Charmaghz's books. Without uttering a word, the children – who were in grades 4-6 – came to her defense, expressing how much they cherished the stories Nabila shared. They said to the councilman, “Your daughter is here and she enjoyed the stories that [Nabila] reads to us. If you say anything bad about [Charmaghz's] Library and our Librarian (Nabila) or don't allow the Library to operate, we will not go to school too.”

As Nabila tells it, “the man was just shocked and didn't say anything more.” The children's responses had left the councilman speechless, highlighting the children's resilience and their unwavering belief in the importance of kindness and books.

Working in Kabul presents its own set of challenges, particularly for women like Nabila, especially now given the presence of the Taliban. Yet, she remains steadfast in her commitment to empower children and provide them with educational opportunities, regardless of the hardships.



Nabila reading with children in the Van Library

Nabila's journey at Charmaghz exemplifies the dedication and passion of the organization's team members. Through their collective efforts, they strive to make a positive impact on the lives of children in Kabul. As Nabila continues her noble work, she remains an inspiration, symbolizing the resilience and determination needed to overcome obstacles and create a brighter future for the children of Afghanistan.

Meet Benafsha

Librarian, Yellow Bus Library

When did you join Charmaghz and why?

I joined Charmaghz in October 2020. I was looking for a part-time job besides my university, to gain experience and to be financially independent. I was a person in love with books, libraries, and children, and Charmaghz could be an ideal job for me. So Charmaghz was a place where I could tell children stories, talk to them, and listen to their problems, it is healing me and makes me feel better.

What does a typical day at Charmaghz look like?

A typical day for me in Charmaghz starts from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM. As the children enter I write down their names and ages. After that, I suggest books based on their grades or ages. I always arrange the books in their special age category which helps children to find their favorite books easily. I love conducting storytelling sessions. I enjoy it too much and it helps me to know their way of thinking, and get to know every child more. During storytelling, I ask them about their favorite animal if the book is about animals. In an effort to encourage critical thinking among the children, I ask them questions like - why did the character in the book do this, if you were them would you do that? Or I ask them what they learned from the story or tell their friends the concept of the story. We have some teaching games that we play. I also give them paper and colored pencils to draw with.



Benafsha reading to children at the Yellow Bus Library

"My favorite part about working at Charmaghz is that it allows me to listen to children and give them the love and compassion that was stolen from them. I want each child to who comes to the library to feel valued."

Do you have a favorite memory of Charmaghz?

Well, when you work in a place like Charmaghz, where you are surrounded by little angels, every day, will be memorable. I remember a day that a man brought his 6-year-old daughter to the Library and told us to look after her and gave her a book. A few weeks after that he came and thanked us a lot. He said: "My daughter was so anti-social. She wasn't talking or expressing herself in front of others. But since visiting the Library, she has changed miraculously. Now she talks a lot and she isn't afraid of talking in front of others.

What are some challenges that you have faced while working?

Working in Afghanistan has its difficulties, especially in other provinces where women aren't even allowed to get out of their houses. In Kabul, women are working more than in other places still it's not socially normalized or accepted. I personally have faced a lot of challenges in the first few days and some of those challenges are still there.

Working in a Library in a country where most people are illiterate is really hard. Even people who are literate do not understand the value of books. So one regular problem that I have is that whenever men walk beside the Library they would start making fun or say negative things. They ask a lot of questions and most of the time they want us to stop our activities in school. We faced the biggest challenges when our Libraries were banned temporarily by the government only because all the Librarians were women.



Drawings from children at the Yellow Bus.

I hope Charmaghz continues its existence and one day all Afghan children get the chance to visit Charmaghz Mobile Libraries.

What is your favorite part about working at Charmaghz?

I love a lot of things about Charmaghz. Like the beautiful and peaceful environment inside the library. But my favorite part about working at Charmaghz is that it allows me to listen to children and give them the love and compassion that was stolen from them. I want each child who comes to the library to feel valued. Charmaghz is helping children learn new things, important things, academic and meaningful things that they need for their lives.



Children of Charmaghz



Meet Heena

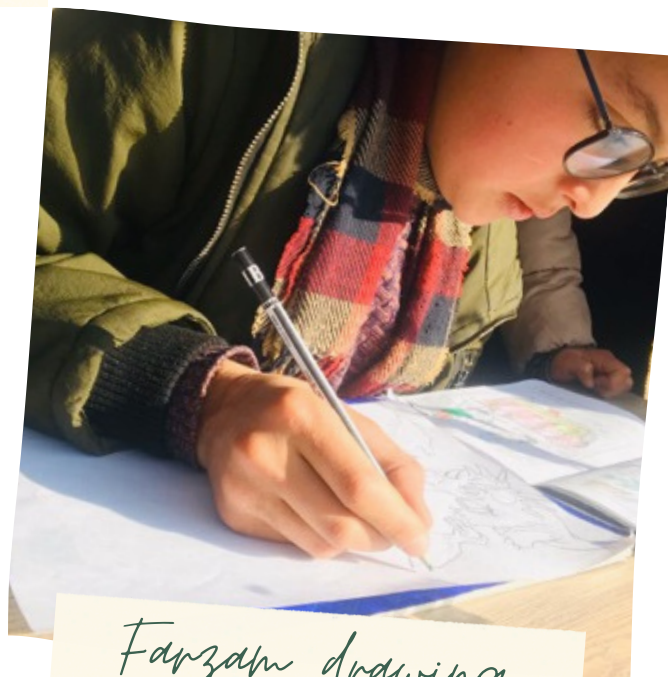
At the age of eight, Heena is as kind as she is clever! She is a regular visitor to the Charmaghz Library and is a source of motivation and energy. The Librarian at the Yellow Bus told us "She has this unique ability to lift everyone's spirit, one day I saw her helping a very shy boy with his drawing."



Heena with her favorite book

Meet Farzam

Our Librarians call 14-year-old Farzam "The innovation angel"! Farzam has a deep passion for drawing and is always looking for books with intricate pictures he can draw. He loves dinosaurs and wants to become an artist when he grows up!



Farzam drawing

Meet Bahar and Abdurrahman



Meet Bahar Jan and Abdurrahman Jan, the adventurous 5-year-old best friends who light up the library with their infectious enthusiasm. Whenever they visit, they create their unique story time ritual, flipping through the pages with awe. Although they're not reading the words yet, the captivating illustrations spark their imaginations, and together, they embark on thrilling adventures. Their laughter and animated expressions add a touch of magic to their storytelling sessions.



Looking at stories



My best friend





Meet Uthman

Meet 11-year-old Uthman Jan, a regular visitor to our Green Bus Library in Kabul. His favorite book is "The Wisdom of Ahmad Shaah Baba" by Idriss Shaah. The librarians admire his intelligence and unwavering thirst for knowledge. As soon as he enters, he's on the hunt for new books, having read most of our collection already!

Uthman's passion for learning is matched only by his love for cricket. Dreaming big, he aspires to become an author one day. We're proud to nurture young talents like Uthman, fostering a love for reading and empowering dreams to take flight!



favorite book is "The Wisdom of Ahmad Shaah Baba"





Overcoming Challenges

Adapting to Taliban Controlled Afghanistan

In the face of a changing landscape in Afghanistan under Taliban control, Charmaghz has embarked on a steadfast journey of adaptation to ensure the continuity of educational support for the children of this country. Our efforts have included negotiating with the Taliban at various levels and reexamining our strategy. We have engaged in consultations with communities and peer organizations to establish robust networks of support, fostering resilience and unity during these challenging times.

In addition, we are acutely aware of the impact of oppression, particularly on our female staff members. As such, we have prioritized their mental health and created awareness around the importance of self-care and support systems. Adapting our funding strategy has been a critical step in sustaining our operations. We have focused on building connections and partnerships with international funders who share our vision of empowering Afghan children through education. In 2024, Charmaghz is also registering in the US for long-term sustainability.

While planning for the worst, we remain steadfast in our commitment to our goals. We understand the challenges we may face, but we refuse to let adversity dampen our spirits or compromise the education of the children we serve. At Charmaghz, we stand firm in our dedication to empowering Afghan children through literacy and critical thinking. Our resolve remains unyielding, as we believe education holds the power to shape a brighter future.



"Yes we are Afghan
women, steadfast like our
towering mountains and
as brave as the memory of
our ancestors."

Nabila - Librarian,
Van Library

Charmaghz in the News

Charmaghz made headlines in 2022 and 2023, and was represented at ten global conferences, including the World Economic Forum and the World Literacy Summit. Our Country Director, Siyam Ahmad Barakati, was recognized in the International Literacy Association's "30 under 30 Literacy Readers." Additionally, Charmaghz was featured in ten articles and interviews, where we shared our impactful work and vision for children's education in Afghanistan. With each recognition, we are inspired to reach more communities in Afghanistan, providing access to quality education and shaping a brighter future for children.

Featured in



Our Partners

Thank you to our donors and partners

Donors



Implementing Partners



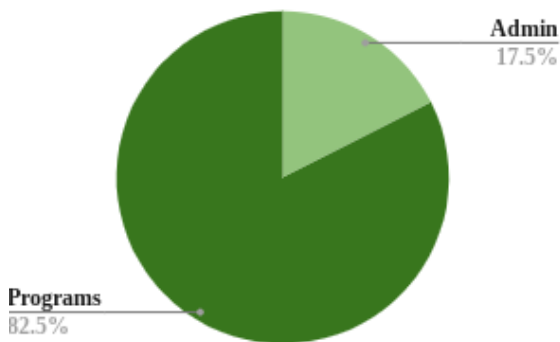
Our Finances

Charmaghz strives to have absolute transparency and accountability in our finances. Each year Charmaghz conducts a financial audit, which is available to the public on Charmaghz’s website. Our current operating budget for 2024 is \$350,000.

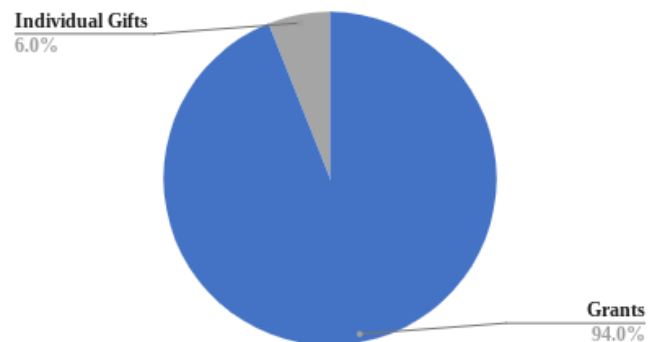
Since 2021 we have shifted our funding strategy dramatically and now rely on a combination of restricted and un-restricted funding from institutional and individual donors. Since shifting our strategy the majority of our funding now comes from foundations and a smaller portion from individual donors.

Our hope, as we look to 2024, is to continue growing our organization to deepen our impact for Afghan children.

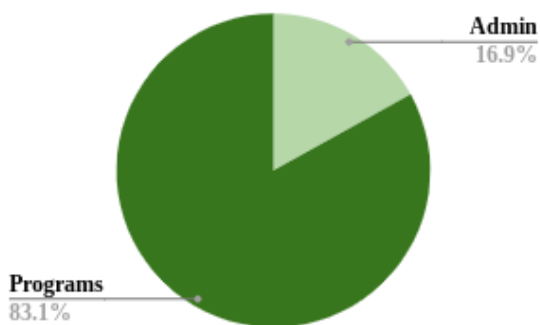
2023 Expenses - \$183,961



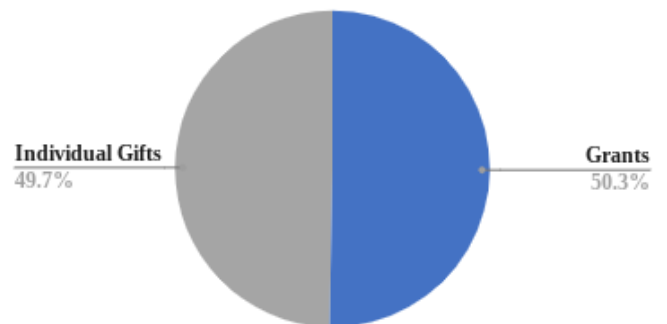
2023 Revenue - \$228,343



2022 Expenses - \$94,092



2022 Revenue - \$181,763



The Road Ahead

Navigating the Past, Present, and Future

Charmaghz is deeply dedicated to fulfilling our mission to serve Afghanistan’s children, despite the known and unknown challenges ahead. Afghanistan continues to be a highly volatile, complex, and oppressive context.

It is immensely burdensome and infinitely contentious to operate a rights-based NGO with a female-majority team under the Taliban government. However, every member of our team—and our partners and advocates around the world—recognize that we simply have to continue if we want children’s future to look any different than our present. Now more than ever, we believe Afghan children have a right to quality education as well as a peaceful future—both of which must begin with a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy. These basic skills are a non-negotiable foundation for a life of learning, possibility, dignity, and agency for every child.

Despite the difficulties, we are tremendously excited to continue Charmaghz’s work and support the dreams of Afghan children. None of this would be possible without our community of partners and champions, whose transformative support enables us to keep moving forward, on behalf of children.



Thank You!

Would you like to know more about how to support Afghan children or partner with Charmaghz? Please contact us via our website or email us directly at freshta.karim@charmaghz.org



www.charmaghz.org



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