

Reaching their full potential

In partnership with ROSL, the Commonwealth Girls Education Fund (CGEF) is helping girls in rural Pakistan get the education they deserve, as CGEF Trustee Bea Hemming explains

At the Commonwealth Girls Education Fund, we have been supporting girls' education for 50 years. Our charity's mission is a very simple one: we provide financial help to the very brightest girls across the Commonwealth, girls who would not be able to continue in school without our sponsorship.

In 2018, we helped 322 girls through secondary education in 35 Commonwealth countries. With the generous support of the ROSL's Golden Jubilee Trust, we currently sponsor 21 girls in Pakistan, mostly in rural areas in the Sindh and Balochistan provinces.

Our scheme is tailored to the needs and circumstances of each girl and is based on her academic potential. We monitor our girls' progress through their school reports and an annual letter from

each girl. These letters provide a sometimes heart-breaking but always inspiring insight into the difficult lives of these young women and their determination to succeed. In Pakistan, many girls not only face the obstacles of great poverty, they also have to fight to convince their parents that they deserve to be educated.

Armeena's story is typical. The daughter of a labourer and the eldest of seven siblings, she grew up in a rural village in the Sindh province, helping her parents look after her six younger brothers and sisters. Armeena dreams of becoming a teacher, but her parents can't understand the point of educating girls.

'According to them,' she writes, 'girls education is useless, because girls have to get married and leave their home... This hurts me deeply, but I want to complete my education and support my parents by becoming a successful lady.'

With our sponsorship Armeena has been able to do just that. We help fund her school fees, as well as all the essential costs of books, stationery, uniforms, and transport, which can be prohibitive for families in rural areas.

One day, Sahar hopes to become a nurse. But as the only daughter with four brothers, her father refused to allow her to continue in school beyond the age of 13. Like many of the girls in her school, Sahar works to support her family's income, making handicrafts and teaching the young

children in her village. Despite her father's opposition, Sahar's teachers and her mother encouraged her, and put her forward for sponsorship from the CGEF. Eventually, after she showed her father her excellent school results, he too began to understand the importance of her education.

Not all the girls face opposition from their parents. Aisha's father had always encouraged her education and helped her reach the top of her class. But he died when she was still young, putting great financial pressure on the family. Like many of the young girls from the villages, Aisha's family have arranged

a marriage for her and, at the age of 13, she is already engaged. Aisha loves to read, and she wants to continue at school, and hopes to become an English teacher and educate her younger brother and sister.

When we started sponsoring Tahmina at the age of 13, she was one of the highest achieving girls in her class. She dreamed of becoming an army officer after finishing secondary school. When she wrote to us again a year later, her life had changed dramatically.

'My parents arranged my marriage last year during my studies,' she writes, 'and now I am going to be a mother in a few

months. Early marriage has stolen my dreams and ambitions.' But it has not diminished her enthusiasm for her studies and her determination to complete them. Her husband has no job and her parents-in-law would be unable to support her school fees. It is only with the help of the CGEF that she is able to carry on going to school. She still hopes to finish school and join the army.

The trustees of the CGEF are enormously grateful to the Golden Jubilee Trust for their ongoing support. Education should be a right for every young woman; together we can ensure that girls like Armeena, Sahar, Tahmina

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and Aisha reach their full potential, despite the obstacles of poverty and discrimination. Educating girls transforms individual lives and empowers whole communities. As Aisha writes: 'Education is our best weapon to fight our future life.'

To hear more about the work of the Commonwealth Girls Education Fund, visit www.cgefund.org and read updates on ROSL's part in it in each issue of Overseas.

To find out how you can support ROSL's education projects, visit www.rosl.org.uk/humanitarian



1960 The year ROSL's Golden Jubilee Trust was set up to mark the club's 50 th anniversary	1994 ROSL begins its education projects across the Commonwealth	1998 ROSL's Royal Charter includes humanitarian projects for the first time	2018 ROSL begins working with the Commonwealth Girls Education Fund in Pakistan
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